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**Citation for published version:**

Jeffery, P., Jeffery, R. & Jeffrey, C. 2004, 'Islamization, gentrification and domestication: 'A girls' Islamic course' and rural Muslims in western Uttar Pradesh', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 38, pp. 153.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X040010015>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X040010015>

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Modern Asian Studies

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X040010015>

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Modern Asian Studies / Volume 38 / Issue 01 / February 2004, pp 1 - 53

DOI: 10.1017/S0026749X040010015, Published online: 17 February 2004

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0026749X04001015](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0026749X04001015)

### How to cite this article:

Patricia Jeffery, Roger Jeffery and Craig Jeffrey (2004). Islamization, Gentrification and Domestication: 'A Girls' Islamic Course' and Rural Muslims in Western Uttar Pradesh. *Modern Asian Studies*, 38, pp 1-53 doi:10.1017/S0026749X040010015

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# *Islamization, Gentrification and Domestication: ‘A Girls’ Islamic Course’ and Rural Muslims in Western Uttar Pradesh<sup>1</sup>*

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Girls’ education has been enduringly controversial in north India, and the disputes of the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century still echo in debates about girls’ education in contemporary India. In this paper, we reflect on the education of rural Muslim girls in contemporary western Uttar Pradesh (UP), by examining an Islamic course for girls [*Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course*], written in Urdu and widely used in *madrasahs* there. First, we summarize the central themes in the *Course*: purifying religious practice; distancing demure, self-controlled, respectable woman from the lower orders; and the crucial role of women as competent homemakers. Having noted the conspicuous similarities between these themes and those in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century textbooks and advice manuals for girls and women, the second section examines the context in which the earlier genre emerged.<sup>2</sup> Finally, we return to the present day. Particularly since September 11th 2001, *madrasahs* have found themselves the focus of hostile allegations that

<sup>1</sup> We thank the Economic and Social Research Council (grant Ro0238495), the Ford Foundation, and the Royal Geographical Society for funding aspects of this research, and the Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi, for our attachment there in 2000–2. We were in Bijnor, western Uttar Pradesh October–April 2000–1 and October–April 2001–2. We are grateful to our research assistants, Swaleha Begum, Shaila Rais, Chhaya Sharma, and Manjula Sharma, to the people of Qaziwala and Nangal Jat, and the schoolteachers, *madrasah* staff and others who so readily answered our questions. Thanks are also due to Mukulika Banerjee, Laura Jeffery, Barbara Metcalf, Christina Oesterheld, Francesca Orsini, Margrit Pernau, and to colleagues in Edinburgh, Heidelberg, Oxford and York for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. None bears any responsibility for what we have written here.

<sup>2</sup> In passing, we note that there were comparable genres of advice literature for women in Europe, north America and elsewhere throughout the same period and well into the 20th century.

bear little or no relationship to the activities of the *madrasahs* that we studied. Nevertheless, *madrasah* education does have problematic implications. The special curricula for girls exemplifies how a particular kind of élite project has been sustained and transformed, and we aim to shed light on contemporary communal and class issues as well as on gender politics.

The issue of girls' education in UP has by no means been resolved. In the present political climate, this is perhaps particularly so with respect to Muslim girls' education. Gender differentials in educational outcomes and literacy, for instance, are still marked: female literacy rates in Uttar Pradesh (at 43% of the population aged 7 and above) still trail the rates for males (at 70%), and are well below the national levels (Census of India 2001). Female literacy rates are lower among the poor and in rural areas. Official data do not disaggregate by religious community, but several studies indicate that Muslims in UP are disproportionately located towards the bottom of the urban and rural economic hierarchies. Thus Muslim literacy rates are almost certainly lower than the aggregate figures (Shariff 1995). Our research was based in Bijnor District in western UP, which is notable for its demographic profile. Towns in Bijnor District generally have populations at least 50% Muslim, and the rural Muslim population—at about 32% in 1991—is one of the largest proportions in UP (Census of India 1991). Muslim girls' formal education in the district is rather recent, especially in the rural areas. Nowadays, urban Muslim girls are likely to attend Hindi- or English-medium government, government-aided or private schools, finances permitting. In rural areas and in poor urban areas, *madrasahs* are much more significant in Muslim formal education. In 1982–3, for instance, only a minority of Muslim girls attended either a school or *madrasah* in the villages north west of Bijnor town.<sup>3</sup> By 2000, though, girls outnumbered boys in the pupil bodies in most *madrasahs* in the locality. The *madrasah* in Begawala, for instance, serves our research village Qaziwala and several nearby villages, and is the largest local rural *madrasah*. It was founded in 1958 and began admitting girls in

<sup>3</sup> Roger Jeffery and Patricia Jeffery did research in Bijnor District in 1982–3 (funded by Social Science Research Council, UK) and in 1990–1 (funded by the Overseas Development Administration). In 1990–1 and 2000–2 we focused on two villages, Qaziwala (a large Muslim-dominated village about 5 km from Bijnor town) and Nangal Jat (a large Jat and Scheduled Caste village). For more on contemporary Bijnor see Jeffery 2000; 2001; Jeffery & Jeffery 1994a; 1996a; 1996b; Jeffery *et al.* 1989; Jeffery & Jeffery 1997.

the late 1970s, though the major growth in female pupil numbers came only during the 1990s. By 2000, there were about 600 girls in the student body of around 1100. Girls were also attending other smaller local *madrasahs*, including one that was exclusively for girls and young women. Around three-quarters of the Muslim girls in Qaziwala were studying at a *madrasah*, generally attending from the age of 5 or 6 until they are 13–14 years old. Most other Muslim girls were not in formal education.<sup>4</sup>

Our research in 2000–2 explored whether (and if so, how) secondary schooling is changing patterns and processes of social inequality and social exclusion along class, caste, gender and community lines. Part of this entailed surveying fifteen *madrasahs* in Bijnor town and all five *madrasahs* serving Qaziwala and our other research village, Nangal Jat. We interviewed over forty *maulwīs*, ‘masters’ and *ustānīs* [women teachers]. We also talked to village parents, but could not systematically interview *madrasah* pupils. What we can say here, then, is limited to the discourses of educators and parents.

### A Girls’ Islamic Course

*Madrasah* students in Bijnor town and the surrounding villages are initially taught to read introductory primers [*qā`ida*] for Urdu and simple extracts from the *Qur`ān Sharīf*. Then they graduate to the *Qur`ān Sharīf* itself, which they may sight-read [*nāzira*] or memorize [*hifz*, *hāfiza*]. In addition, children are taught the central theological and moral doctrines of Islam (ablutions, prayer, alms, fasting, the *hajj* pilgrimage). The most commonly used Urdu textbooks include *Dīnī Ta`līm* [Religious Education] (Thanawi 1997), *Ta`līm-ul Islām* [Islamic Education] (Kifayatullah n.d.), *Fazā`il-e-a`māl* [Virtuous Actions] (Kandhlavi 1999).<sup>5</sup> Arabic and Farsi are usually taught only

<sup>4</sup> Only a handful of teenage girls attended a school. Discussions with parents and *madrasah* teachers indicated that boys tended to drop out of *madrasahs* earlier than girls, either to take up employment or an apprenticeship or (less commonly) to transfer to a school. See Jeffery *et al.* Forthcoming-a for more on these topics.

<sup>5</sup> Margrit Pernau has suggested [personal communication] that the personal affiliation of the writer seems to matter little to the audience. This list is certainly quite eclectic: Thanawi was linked to Deoband, Kifayatullah to the Ahl-e Hadith, and Kandhlavi to the Tabligh-e Jama`at. The Begawala *madrasah* is also recognized by the UP Board of Education to teach up to 5th class, and its curriculum includes Hindi, English and maths. The *Basic Urdu Reader* (Anon.) includes chapters on history and geography and is also used at Begawala.

to the more advanced classes and some *madrasahs* also teach Hindi and English. The basic teaching of the *Qur'ān Sharīf* and the Urdu primers was much the same for boys and girls, but some *madrasahs*—including Begawala—also used books specifically targeted at girls.

Several *ustānīs* glossed portions of *Bihishti Zewar* for their pupils because they considered the original too difficult for them.<sup>6</sup> More commonly, they used the five-part *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* [Girls' Islamic Course], which is intended as a textbook primarily for girls up to about class 5. Each slim booklet is small enough to hold easily and the first parts are in simple Urdu, interspersed with line drawings. The language becomes progressively more complex and the chapters become longer. The Course has been in circulation since 1961 and its author, Maulana Maqbul Ahmed Seoharvi came from Seohara, about 50 km south east of Bijnor town (Seoharvi 1961). The *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* books each contain 20–25 sections, on topics ranging from recipes to dowry, and from embroidery to poems, questions and riddles [*pahelī*] with a theological bent. Didactic tales rebuke anti-heroines, while eulogies portray exemplary fictitious or historical figures. Roughly half detail 'religious' practices such as ablutions before praying or are stories criticizing 'un-Islamic' practices. Most of the rest are about equally divided between concerns with a person's dealings with other people and with a woman's domestic competence. Several combine these themes. The story of Bibi Aisha (one of the Prophet's wives) captures the tone of virtue, generosity, learning and self-improvement that echoes through the course. She became a storehouse for knowledge about the Prophet that still provides an example for Muslims in their daily lives: 'Even to this day, her lap remains the place where scores of girls can catch hold of her instruction, run in the plain of life and improve themselves.'<sup>7</sup> Here we outline the main themes in the *Course*: we provide a more detailed exegesis in the final section of this paper.

<sup>6</sup> *Bihishti Zewar* was originally published in about 1905 and is now available in numerous editions and revisions by other authors, in Urdu and in several English translations. It is still very widely bought, though little is known about its readership, which sections they study and how they interpret what they read. The partial translation by Barbara Metcalf (1990) includes her useful commentaries on the book and its context; see below for more on *Bihishti Zewar*.

<sup>7</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 4: 7 *Bibi Aisha*. This and all the following summaries are based on Patricia Jeffery's translations.

*Islamization*

A central thread in the *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* is the regulation of one’s activities around the correct performance of ablutions, punctuality in prayer, fasting properly, and reciting the *Qur’ān Sharīf* and so forth. Several longer pieces also admonish women for blindly following ‘un-Islamic’ customs or for failing to meet their Islamic obligations.<sup>8</sup> Hinduism is seldom mentioned directly, but the hostility to idolatry and to expensive ‘un-Islamic’ customs can certainly be read as critiques of contemporary (and implicitly Hindu) India and its consumerism.

Women are chided for believing in omens and consulting astrologers and palmists. Belief in omens sheds doubt on a person’s faith in God, since nothing can happen without God’s orders.<sup>9</sup> Punishment in hell awaits those who make a living out of predictions, so, if astrologers really knew the future, they would not sit under peepul trees doing this work. A gruesome tale underlines the point: Haroon Rashid Abbasi in Baghdad believed an astrologer who predicted his imminent death. When a courtier asked the astrologer how long he (the astrologer) would live, the astrologer said he still had many years. At this, the courtier chopped off the astrologer’s head, proving conclusively his inability to predict the future. Astrology makes people worry, we are told, and the *sharī‘at* says that it is a great sin to believe in it.<sup>10</sup>

Wasteful expense on ‘un-Islamic’ customs is frequently criticized. A man somewhat crabby tells his wife that extravagance, carelessness and negligence [*fazūl kharch, be-parwāi, gāflat*] have ruined countries and families. He forbids her to host extravagant ceremonies that have no Islamic sanction. People should never take loans for such activities or indulge in wasteful expenditure that results in momentary *wah-wah* [bravo] but *āh-āh* [alas] for the rest of one’s life. His contrite wife pledges to read religious books to learn what is permitted.<sup>11</sup> A contractor and his wife mark their son’s circumcision by buying jewellery, giving money to various callers and arranging

<sup>8</sup> The Course, however, presents the stories in a definitive and didactic style that allows no room for acknowledging that what is ‘un-Islamic’ is a matter of interpretation and debate among different schools of thought.

<sup>9</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 4: 15 ‘*Shugūn*’ or ‘*Omens*’.

<sup>10</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 4: 20 ‘*Nujūmī aur j̄yotishī*’ or ‘*Astrologers*’.

<sup>11</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 4: 14 ‘*Gharī bhar kī wah-wah, umr bhar kī āh-āh*’ or ‘*“Bravo” for just a moment, “alas” for the rest of life*’.

feasts. The most respected local *maulānā* refuses to attend, however, because Allah objects to such costly display and festivity—not least because the contractor had previously claimed he was too poor to give alms [*zakāt*]. The contractor begins to cry—but out of fear, says nothing when he returns home to his wife!<sup>12</sup> Shahida wants to borrow money to pay for her daughter's wedding, so that the family's 'nose will not be cut'. Her husband, Maulwi Abul Hasan, launches into a stern homily. Is spending more than they have on the dowry either a religious duty [*farz*] or recommended in Islam [*sunnat*]? A Muslim girl is not excluded from her father's property after marriage. Parents give in order to elevate their own noses, not because of their daughter's needs. He does not want a false show. Nor is his nose higher than the Prophet's. Shahida says he has removed a veil of negligence [*gaflat kā parda*] and he should set the wedding date, for she will not be perverse [*ziddī*].<sup>13</sup> A *maulwī* (described as an enemy of marriage customs) discusses the proposed marriage between his son and his friend's daughter. The latter talks about the 'laws of society' [*samāj kā qānūn*] that dictate how to perform marriages, but the *maulwī* condemns all such practices as foreign to Islam [*yeh tamām tarīqē gair Islāmī hain*]. He will do nothing against Islam, because he will have to answer to Allah. Thus no dowry should be given. He wants a girl who is *sāleha* [virtuous, chaste] and *pākḥāz* [undefiled, sincere], who is knowledgeable about Islam, who respects her elders and is compassionate towards children. Then wealth and blessings will come and the benefactions of Allah will be within reach. A highlighted section immediately after the dialogue criticizes the astronomical sums settled on brides as *mahr* to enhance family prestige. People should name only a small sum in *mahr*—as the Prophet did for Bibi Fatima—as that accords with Islamic injunctions and is easy to collect together.<sup>14</sup>

Other 'un-Islamic' customs are harmful, but not necessarily financially draining. Hajra chides her sister Sadeqa, whose daughter is doing *māyūn*, the practice of secluding a girl in a room for several days before the marriage ceremony. Hajra insists that the girl is brought outside because she will become ill, sitting in suffocating heat and stale air for several days, being fed only sweets. 'Who is

<sup>12</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 3: 22 'Thekādārnī ke zewār' or 'The contractor's wife's ornaments'.

<sup>13</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 3: 6 'Ūnchī nāk kis kī?' or 'Whose nose is elevated?'

<sup>14</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 3: 21 'Rasūlallāh ke dāman main panāh' or 'Sheltering in the Prophet's Garments'.



doing this to the girl?’ Hajra taunts. ‘Sadeqa, who has received religious education, who knows a little English, who has learnt Urdu and Farsi and who reads newspapers and magazines!’ The penitent Sadeqa claims she agreed to do it only because a neighbour said it was an old custom. Hajra retorts that *māyūn* is bad for health and is nowhere written in the *sharī‘at*.<sup>15</sup> The Course also emphasizes how highly valued women are in Islam, often explicitly contrasting the early days of Islam with pre-Islamic Arabia and contemporary India. A poem, for instance, insists that a girl’s parents should be happy and bow their heads in thankfulness for Allah’s gift. They should educate and rear her, and teach her all the etiquette she needs for this life. She is ‘queen of the home, the light of all gatherings.’<sup>16</sup>

One section likens people who are bound by irreligious and heretical cages [*be-dīnī aur shirk ke pinjre*] to caged animals, no better than a parrot that repeats some words but makes no progress. People in Arabia worshipped statues, danced naked, buried girls alive, and worshipped the sun, moon and trees, but they escaped their cages when the Prophet preached to them. Muslims in India, however, do not have the courage to break out. They are plagued by debts—because of their expensive ‘un-Islamic’ practices—but do not follow the Prophet’s teachings or example. If people break their cages and the chains that bind them, their wings will be free and they will be able to fly high.<sup>17</sup> Following Islamic requirements and expunging ‘un-Islamic’ customs, then, are crucial.

### *Gentrification*

Significantly, though, a list of sins that Allah will not absolve all concern dealings with other people, such as unpaid debts, deception, taunting, mimicry, slander and failure to request forgiveness for one’s failings.<sup>18</sup> People should be generous to needy neighbours and strangers. A passage from the *Qur’ān Sharīf* is translated into Urdu: Muslims are those who give precedence to others, even if it means that they themselves must go hungry.<sup>19</sup> But generosity should not

<sup>15</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 4: 13 ‘*Māyūn baithi hain*’ or ‘*Sitting in seclusion*’.

<sup>16</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 4: 1 ‘*Larkī hai ek daulat*’ or ‘*A girl is good fortune*’.

<sup>17</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 4: 19 ‘*Pinjron ke jānwar*’ or ‘*Caged Animals*’.

<sup>18</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 4: 9 ‘*Khudā mo’āf na karegā*’ or ‘*God will not pardon*’.

<sup>19</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 1: 12 ‘*Achche gharon ke nowkr bhi achche*’ or ‘*Servants in good houses are also good*’ and 3: 15 ‘*Mehmān Nawāzī*’ or ‘*Courtesy to Guests*’.

result in pride and self-aggrandisement. It is sinful to broadcast one's greatness and another person's neediness. It is not good to be kind to one person and tell ten others about your kindness.<sup>20</sup> Honesty is also at a premium. One lively story likens a girl's struggle with her conscience to a wrestling match, except that there is no audience of thousands of men to clap their hands and shout '*Shābāsh!*' [excellent] to acknowledge her victory. After her father's death, Choti became a servant for a wealthy businessman's wife. Choti never lied and she never touched things that did not belong to her. One day, when she is raking out the ashes in the brazier, she finds a precious ring. There is a lengthy tussle between Choti (who knows she should not commit a sin) and her heart (which tells her to keep the ring, as no one will know about it). But Choti is not defeated and, with a face wreathed in the grin of a victorious wrestler, she reports her find to the businessman's wife, who gives her a cash reward. Choti says that it was her duty and she should not be rewarded. The businessman's wife is so taken aback by Choti's exalted comment that she tells Choti that she is now her daughter not her servant. Only the businessman's wife saw Choti's triumph, although Choti felt that applause was coming from the doors and walls of the house. Now you tell me, the story concludes, who are stronger, wrestlers or this girl? And, what's more, was not this small girl [*choti*] made big?<sup>21</sup>

People should also have good manners [*adāb*] and consideration for other people. Thus they should endeavour to overcome all their offensive, uncouth and inconsiderate habits and have self-control in their bodily deportment, personal cleanliness and style of eating and drinking. The close links between formal religious practice (such as ablutions and prayer) and good manners in relation to eating and drinking are addressed in a lengthy section on the etiquette for eating and for drinking water [*khāne ke adāb* and *pānī pīne ke adāb*]. Muslims should eat with their right hand—as ordained by Allah—and not imitate strangers [*gair*]. They should wash their hands, gargle and recite the *bismillah* before eating and then take small portions that they chew thoroughly but quietly. They should not blow on food to cool it, wipe their hands with the bread, place utensils on it or throw bread or stew onto the floor. They should not overeat, but take small helpings of simple food. In Islam, simplicity is pre-

<sup>20</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course 4: 21* '*Nekī kar aur nekī kā zikr kisi se na kar*' or '*Do good deeds but don't keep reminding people about them*'.

<sup>21</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course 4: 8* '*Larkī ne kushṭī jīt lī*' or '*The girl won at wrestling*'.

ferred and cleanliness and purity are required. Muslims should not cause problems for others, by putting their fingers in the dishes, clearing their throats in the direction of the food, putting morsels of food that have touched their teeth back into dishes, or reminding people about disgusting things while they are eating. After eating, they should clear the dishes properly and roll up the *dastarkhwan* [dining-cloth on the floor, on which dishes of food are placed and people sit to eat] before people stand up. Then they should thank Allah, wash their hands and gargle to rinse their mouth. Food is a gift from Allah and should be treated with proper respect. Muslims should neither criticize someone else’s cooking nor praise it so much that food seems all that is important. They should be thankful for the food they have, for there are millions of sisters for whom such food is unattainable. After thinking about those who are less fortunate, Muslims will be able to welcome what Allah has given them. The Prophet has instructed all this, and Muslims shall be rewarded for behaving accordingly.

Similarly, there is the Islamic way to drink water: always sitting down to drink; reciting the *bismillah* before starting, and removing the vessel from one’s mouth and reciting the *bismillah* between each breath. Gold and silver vessels, leather water bags and earthenware pitchers are all forbidden.<sup>22</sup> Another story graphically describes disgusting, harmful and inconsiderate habits such as chewing *pān* [betel nut and tobacco] and spitting. Spitting stains people’s houses and one time when the anti-heroine laughed the clothes of the girls sitting beside her also became spotted with red stains. Moreover, *pān* is expensive and tobacco is bad for the health. Several things are reprehensible in women and such women are regarded with contempt: spitting out squirts of *pān*; belching loudly; extracting phlegm from the nose; spitting after clearing one’s throat; and speaking loudly.<sup>23</sup>

Muslims should be quietly spoken and respectful. Children must obey their parents, emulate what they do when praying and drinking water, and never speak loudly in front of their father or shout at their mother.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, respecting one’s parents is essential and Muslims should always hold their mothers in high regard.<sup>25</sup> A rather terse list

<sup>22</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 3: 23 ‘*Islāmī Fashion*’ or ‘*The Islamic way*’.

<sup>23</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 3: 11 ‘*Pān kī pichkāriyan*’ or ‘*Squirts of pān*’.

<sup>24</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 1: 9 ‘*Ham ne sikh liya*’ or ‘*We have learnt*’.

<sup>25</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 5: 5 ‘*Hazrat Nizāmuddin Auliya kī vālda Bibī Zulaikha*’ or ‘*Bibī Zulaikha, the mother of Hazrat Nizāmuddin Auliya*’, 5: 6 ‘*Makhduma Jahān*’ and 5: 7

describes the qualities of a virtuous and dutiful woman [*nek-bakht aurat*]: among other things, she bows [*sijda*] before her husband, keeps him happy and respects him, is obedient and submissive [*tābedār*], and does not waste his wealth. The man who has a grateful tongue [*shukr-guzār zabān*] and a virtuous and dutiful wife has a very happy fate [*nasīb*].<sup>26</sup> Fatima is a case in point. Before her marriage to Khalifa Umar, Fatima had worn sumptuous clothes and jewellery because her father was the ruler of Damascus. After he died, Umar succeeded him—and promptly told Fatima that their inherited wealth was the property of all Muslims, because her father had taken wealth from the treasury and given it to his children. Without a second thought, Fatima agreed to Umar’s instruction to send all her valuables to the treasury: ‘My love for you and my obedience are my greatest jewels. What reality do clothing and jewellery have? Women do not obtain salvation from jewellery, but from obedience to their husband.’ Thereafter, we are told, she wore simple clothes and no jewellery and was happy knowing that she had not opposed her husband’s command.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, a long account of the Prophet’s first wife Bibi Khadija ends with the Prophet’s grief when she died: ‘Khadija helped me when there was no one to give me comfort. To enter into her Islam is a thing of great value. She always kept her word. It is true that a wife should be ready to devote herself to her husband and be obedient to him [*jān nisār aur farmān-bardār*].’<sup>28</sup>

### *Domestication*

Aside from wifely obedience, though, little of the foregoing is expected only of girls. Indeed, topics such as these are included in the syllabi taught to boys in madrasahs. Boys, though, are not guided or instructed on the worldly work roles they will adopt as adults. By contrast, the theme of control follows through in the sections in the *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* touching on women’s domestic competence. There are no accounts of women in any workplace outside the home and only two stories portray women anywhere outside, both in the

‘*Gunāh-gār nau-jawān kī mām kī du`ā se bakhshish ho gai*’ or ‘*Blessings from the supplication of a sinful young man’s mother*’.

<sup>26</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 5: 10 ‘*Bīwī kī farā`iz*’ or ‘*The God-given duties of a wife*’.

<sup>27</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 3: 14 ‘*Farmān-bardār bīwī*’ or ‘*Obedient wife*’.

<sup>28</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 4: 6 ‘*Aurat kā darja*’ or ‘*A woman’s distinction*’.

context of battles.<sup>29</sup> The dominant motif is of the good Muslim woman honing housekeeping skills and domestic regulation through her industriousness and efficiency, cleanliness and tidiness, hygienic food preparation, and careful household budgeting and frugality.

Several stories portray badly organized homes, with lectures meted out to contrite wrongdoers. Salma’s father criticizes her dirty and untidy ways, with unwashed dishes, vegetable peelings and leftover food strewn around the kitchen and flies crawling over the uncovered food. What will people say? It is not a businesslike kitchen but an untidy tip. He compares her kitchen to Rukeyya’s spotless and shining kitchen, with no dirty dishes and everything in its place. He tells Salma how to rectify the situation, and he reminds her that she will be able to find clean dishes quickly and that people will think she is well organized and methodical [*salīqa-mand aur sughar*]. Dirt will mount, flies will come and rats will build their nests and leave their droppings if the kitchen is not cleaned properly every day. When she does not respond, her father asks if she is listening. Is she asleep or does she not want to heed what he is saying? She replies ‘Father, what answer can I give? This is certainly my fault, but from now onwards this fault will not happen again. Thanks to Allah.’<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Fahmida’s mother lectures her for laziness and carelessness and warns that she is putting herself in danger of misery in her future married life. Fahmida sleeps too long, leaves important work undone, lolls about and rises late, and does not roll up the bedding in the morning. But she is diligent in chattering. Idleness brings illnesses and Fahmida will eventually reap the fruits of her laziness. Now is the time for improving or spoiling herself. If she does not take care now, she will never do so. And then Fahmida will become so disgusted with the squabbling at her in-laws’ home that she will yearn for death. At this, Fahmida started crying: ‘Mother, from tomorrow you will not see me sleeping after daybreak. And I have borne all your reprimands in mind. Whatever you are saying, you are saying for my benefit alone.’<sup>31</sup>

Then there is the wife who both fails to keep the dining-cloth clean and wags her tongue at her husband. He complains about her slovenly ways: ‘Fie, fie, is this a *dastarkhwaṇ* or is it a cloth for cleaning

<sup>29</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course 4: 12* ‘Bahādur`auratain’ or ‘Valiant Women’ and 3: 16 ‘Hātīm Bai kī betī’ or ‘Hātīm Bai’s daughter’.

<sup>30</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course 2: 7* ‘Hamārā bāwarchī-khāna’ or ‘Our kitchen’.

<sup>31</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course 2: 18* ‘Mān ne betī ko samjhāyā’ or ‘Mother lectured her daughter’.

shoes? It's impossible to count the food stains on it and it smells so bad that I'd like to throw it out! Do you consider me a human being or an animal who will eat whatever you put in front of me?' She retorts that these are just food stains, not urine or faeces. The cloth was washed just a week previously. Does he expect her to wash it daily? Seeing his slovenly and quarrelsome wife's face, he leaves his meal and goes outside. Such women, we are told, do not keep any part of their home clean, but the *dastarkhwan* should be kept especially clean, because food is placed on it, and stains and bad smells destroy people's appetites. Using the *dastarkhwan* to collect vegetables from the *bazār* stains it with mud as well, and insects crawl on it and spread diseases. Women could easily wash the *dastarkhwan* with soap every day in the intervals in their work. And then people could eat their food happily and the wife would not be famed for uncouthness.<sup>32</sup>

Contrast those who fail to meet the required standards with the spotless and efficiently run homes of domestic paragons. Two sisters discuss how their maternal grandmother still works hard, despite her age and frailty—but today's girls do little work and complain about tiring easily. They should stop complaining and work hard [*harkat*], for that is how to achieve blessings [*barkat*].<sup>33</sup> Another story neatly combines theology with domestic industriousness. The Prophet's daughter Bibi Fatima received a grain mill [*chakkī*] when she married. Every morning she ground foodstuffs before her prayers. Like the nail and the two grinding stones, Allah is alone and the earth and the heavens revolve around him. Wheat grains that come close to the nail are not ground to flour, just as people who come close to God will have no problems. Hand milling gives women healthy exercise and produces healthy food. There is only alertness [*chustī*] not sluggishness [*sustī*] in the bodies of women who use a grain mill. Remember, the work the Prophet's daughter used to do is not dishonourable, but brings religious merit. And it provides exercise for free.<sup>34</sup> In similar vein, the industrious and economical housewife who spins thread is reminded of the health benefits, as well as her narrow escape from trivial chatter. Despite being a high status woman (a Sayyid), Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya's mother Bibi Zulaikha was not too proud to spin thread to make ends meet when she was widowed.

<sup>32</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course 2: 8* 'Hamārā dastarkhwan' or 'Our dining-cloth'.

<sup>33</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course 2: 15* 'Harkat main barkat' or 'Blessings in activity'.

<sup>34</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course 2: 1* 'Hazrat Fatima kī chakkī' or 'Hazrat Fatima's Quern'.

Spinning strengthens women’s shoulders and arms and makes their bellies small and their whole bodies good looking. The greatest benefit is that spinning puts a stop to the pointless chatter [*fazūl bātāin*] to which women are so habituated, because they must give their whole attention to it. Spinning for two hours each day can produce enough thread for a household’s needs. And the Prophet Muhammad said that the devil runs away from the sound of the spinning wheel.<sup>35</sup>

One particularly cloying story features the ideal hardworking and dutiful wife, who serves her husband unfailingly, even while she belittles her own efforts. Her entire body is covered with smallpox scars, but she studied hard, learnt how to care for invalids, and how to embroider and cook—so well that girls from the neighbourhood used to learn from her. Somewhat to her surprise, an offer of marriage comes. On her marriage night, she presses her husband’s feet because his servant fails to come. Her husband apologizes for being unjust, but she says no one will know. In any case she is his servant now and her duty is to comfort him. The next morning, she gets up very early, and finds the house dusty, full of cobwebs and badly arranged. So she says her prayers and then sorts and cleans the entire house. Later, her husband catches pneumonia. With her expert nursing care—temperature chart, correct and timely administration of medicines, keeping his room quiet—he recovers. The doctor tells her husband that she is not a wife but an angel [*firishta*]. After the doctor leaves, her husband laughs and asks if he should call her an angel or a saviour [*masīhā*]. She says he should only call her his servant. Thereafter, her husband says that women place men under subjection more by their service than by their beauty.<sup>36</sup>

Closely linked with diligence and effort are hygiene and tidiness. A ‘good servant’ is commended for clearing up dishes and utensils properly, and for tying her hair under a kerchief so that no hairs fall into the food she is cooking.<sup>37</sup> And there is a paean of praise for Shakra’s wonderful cooking and embroidery skills. She keeps all her threads and needles in immaculate order and replaces everything correctly in her sewing pouch the moment she finishes her work. She always keeps herself clean and tidy. Neatly entwining ‘religion’ and domesticity, the final page shows the pillowcase she embroidered for

<sup>35</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 3: 13 ‘Charkhā’ or ‘Spinning wheel’.

<sup>36</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 4: 10 ‘Khidmat se ‘azmat: ek bad-surat larkī kī kahānī’ or ‘Greatness from Service: The story of a bad-looking girl’.

<sup>37</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 1: 12 ‘Achche gharon ke nowkr bhi achche’ or ‘The servants in good houses are also good’.

her brother. It has a floral motif and the motto 'At the first sign of dawn the *mu'azzin* has given the *azān*. Lift your head from the pillow because it is time to pray.'<sup>38</sup>

A well-run house also relies on careful budgeting, which is apparently the woman's responsibility. Wasteful showiness should be avoided, and not just in relation to the extravagance and indebtedness associated with 'un-Islamic' customs. Women's liking for jewellery is one target. Granted, jewellery may be a source of money when necessary—but does it cause more harm than good? Jewellery wears out, never fetches as much money as it costs, and there are many thieves abroad. And the custom of giving jewellery should end, so that poor people can afford to get their daughters married easily.<sup>39</sup> A poem condemns displaying the dowry to wedding guests. Extravagance, pride and ostentation are against Islam. And poor relatives will be shamed into providing larger dowries than they can afford, without appreciating that their debts may continue to increase until their whole house is auctioned off. People should give their daughter a dowry and provide food at weddings—but only having thought carefully and spending according to their own capacity.<sup>40</sup> Everyday expenditure also needs monitoring, for domestic tensions and mistrust are caused by imbalances between income and expenditure. The husband thinks his wife cannot run the home. The wife becomes vexed [*be-zār*], thinking her husband is making secret expenditures. These suspicions [*shubhe*] have such an evil influence [*gīrah*] that the entire household's life becomes unwholesome [*ajīran*]. But Muslim girls cannot keep accounts correctly and escape this discord. They do not see the small expenses that mount up (tea drinking is especially mentioned here). The solution is a proper monthly budget. Knowing the monthly income, calculating what will be consumed and its cost, will ensure that food is not wasted, or the leftovers fed to the children or the fowl. If the budget still does not balance, small cuts should be made in each item until it does. The average household must do this to avoid debts and the sale of property. At first, making a budget causes anxiety, but once the benefits become obvious it causes no worries at all.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course 2: 14* 'Shakra kī tile-dānī' or 'Shakra's sewing pouch'.

<sup>39</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course 3: 17* 'Jān lewā zewar' or 'Ornaments that take life'.

<sup>40</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course 3: 7* 'Jahez kā dikhāwā' or 'Showing off the dowry'.

<sup>41</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course 3: 19* 'Bajat: *kharch kā mahāna andāza*' or 'Budget: calculating monthly expenditures'.



In addition, the good Muslim *mother* must ensure that her children learn all these precepts and bring credit to their families. Somewhat ironically, given the didacticism of the course, we are told that learning is not simply a matter of instruction. A mother’s housekeeping skills, self-discipline and routines, style of interacting with her husband or neighbours, her prayers, recitation of the *Qur’ān Sharīf* and fasting will all be before her children on a daily basis.<sup>42</sup> Indeed the Course emphasizes that the phenomenon of imitation [*naql kā kishma*] necessitates that one’s habits are not reprehensible. Children should not be beaten for copying what they see adults doing, for they will also imitate the beating. Rather, people should abandon their bad habits when their child is born. One mother used only the most respectful forms of address, never shouted or raised her hand to slap anyone, always drank sitting down, did not hold her bread in her hand, and prayed regularly and recited the *Qur’ān Sharīf* every morning. Her husband stopped smoking and abandoned gatherings where cards and chess were played. In time, their child was regarded as an example of excellent behaviour.<sup>43</sup> But if the mother always wants to be victorious, fights and makes faces if someone remonstrates with her, finds faults with others, or belittles someone’s help rather than thanking them as morality demands, her children will acquire the same rooted habit of arguing with everyone. Muslim women should never speak harshly, even to their enemies, but answer softly and smilingly. They should not chide people, because chiding makes enemies out of friends. ‘A milky tongue captures the world, a contrary tongue makes it awry’ [*zabān shīrī mulk gīrī, zabān terhī mulk bānkā*].<sup>44</sup>

In sum, the *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* reflects several qualities of the good Muslim woman. The reader is exhorted to be diligent in her religious practice, pray punctually, recite the *Qur’ān Sharīf* regularly and fast. She should not indulge in ‘un-Islamic’ customs, especially if they entail extravagance. She should be well mannered and deal

<sup>42</sup> Instructions on food suitable for children, how to deal with illnesses, how to protect children’s teeth from decay and the illnesses that are caused by domestic animals are given in *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 3: 9 ‘*Bachon kī khātir*’ or ‘*Caring for children*’ and 3: 10 ‘*Ehtiyātain*’ or ‘*Precautions*’. It is worth noting, however, that the Course is completely silent about menstruation, sexual relations and childbirth, all of which are central to adulthood and married life for women in western UP.

<sup>43</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 3: 18 ‘*Chhote bache*’ or ‘*Little children*’.

<sup>44</sup> *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* 3: 20 ‘*Bolne kā dhang*’ or ‘*The correct way to converse*’.

graciously and considerately with other people, converse with self-control, and eat and drink politely. She should not have disgusting habits, engage in mindless chattering or brag about her own generosity. She should be a skilful and diligent household manager, responsible for methodical organization, cleanliness, tidiness and frugal budgeting.

### Advice Literature for Women and Girls

Until the mid nineteenth century, the Muslim élite in north India favoured Persian over Urdu (written in the Persian script) because it was a classical Islamic language and, along with English, a 'language of power' in British India (Rahman 2002: 198ff.). Little printed literature (as distinct from manuscripts) was widely available in north India until about the 1830s, particularly in vernacular languages such as Urdu. In 1837, Urdu was adopted for much official colonial business in north India, particularly at the lower levels, and employees in the colonial administration, Hindus included, required a good working knowledge of Urdu. Gradually, English and Urdu supplanted Persian. Only in the early twentieth century, moreover, did the Devanagari script begin to take hold.<sup>45</sup>

Over the latter half of the nineteenth century, speeches and staged debates remained popular, but Urdu print media became a major forum in which religious and political issues were discussed in tracts and pamphlets, newspapers and magazines, textbooks and fiction, and theological texts. Ironically, the *ʿulamā* had pioneered the use of Urdu—rather than Persian—print materials, but their monopolistic access to religious knowledge was eroded now that the

<sup>45</sup> The Urdu script is largely the same as the Persian script, although Urdu has some additional letters. Devanagari script was also taught in government primary schools during the latter half of the 19th century, but this was at odds with the need to know the Persian script in order to obtain government service. Robinson (1993: 10–83) talks of an Urdu-speaking élite of Muslims and certain high caste Hindus (such as Kayasths, Rajputs, Kashmiri Brahmins) who had a tradition of colonial service. Present-day distinctions between Urdu as a language associated with Muslims, written in Persian script and with Arabic and Persian loan-words, and Hindi as a language associated with Hindus, written in Devanagari script and with Sanskrit loan-words, did not apply in that period. Some recent authors prefer to see Urdu and Hindi as distinct languages, others as a single language with two scripts. For more on the language debates in north India and the Hindi movement in particular, see Brass 1974; King 1989; 1994; Kumar 1991: 124ff.; 1993; Lelyveld 1993; Orsini 2002; Rai 2001; Russell 1999a.

urban middle classes could more easily obtain reading material in Urdu (Metcalf 1982: Chapter 5; 1992; Robinson 1996). One long-standing controversy was whether girls should be taught to read and write, and whether they should attend school. The women’s magazines, advice manuals and textbooks published from about 1870 onwards are a sub-set of this Urdu printed material, and have provided a rich seam for historians. For anyone familiar with this earlier genre, the *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* provides few surprises. The themes are parallel and the qualities of the ‘good Muslim woman’ are similar. Comparable literary techniques are also deployed: slovenly, incompetent and rude anti-heroines; sermonizing didacticism (from men as well as women) tinged with misogyny; references to a glorious past when women were more valued and more industrious; and portraits of educated, capable and honourable domestic paragons. Initially, the advice literature was mainly written by men, although women were—often critically—contributing to magazines by the 1920s.

Bibi Ashraf provides an emblematic case of the difficulties girls faced in becoming literate in mid-nineteenth-century north India. She was born in 1840 into a land-owning family in Bhanera, a small town some 20 km north east of Bijnor town. She eventually became head teacher of Victoria Girls School in Lahore, where she worked until her death in 1903. In 1899, Bibi Ashraf contributed an Urdu essay about her childhood struggles to obtain education to the women’s magazine *Tahzīb un-Niswān* [Women’s Refinement] (Naim 1987). She and other girls in her family had some instruction at home from a widowed *ustānī* [female teacher], whose employment was terminated because she remarried. Thereafter, Bibi Ashraf employed various ruses, including secretly making ink from soot on the griddle so that she could teach herself to write, an extremely controversial skill for a girl. Bibi Ashraf’s experiences seem quite typical of girls in her class at that time: at most, schooling conducted in the home by an *ustānī*, with inputs from literate female family members. Girls in poorer homes, especially in the rural areas, were likely to remain completely illiterate. Few writers approved of educational institutions for girls outwith the home, and the amount and kind of education that girls should receive was also controversial.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Typically, boys’ education was informal, either with a private tutor in the student’s home or a renowned teacher who accommodated pupils in his own home. During the 18th century, however, several curricula were formalized—e.g. the Dars-i Nizami developed at the Farangi Mahall in Lucknow (Robinson 2001), and

For instance, Sayyid Ahmad Khan is usually regarded as a ‘modernist’, yet he opposed schooling for girls because boys’ education itself had made so little progress.<sup>47</sup>

The British authorities also entered the fray though school textbook competitions that particularly specified the need for readable textbooks suitable for girls (Minault 1998a: Chapters 1 & 2; Naim 1984). Two of the earliest textbooks for girls—and the most widely discussed by historians of the subject—provided fictional heroines as role models for the ideal, educated Muslim woman. Nazir Ahmad’s book *Mirāt ul-ʿArūs* [The Bride’s Mirror] won a prize in 1870 and was included in school syllabi (Ahmad 2001 [1903]).<sup>48</sup> Akbari is ‘illiterate, ill-tempered and absolutely without talent’: she keeps an untidy and dirty home and cannot cook. Her younger sister Asghari is ‘literate, sweet-tempered and multitalented’ (Naim 1984: 302). Without breaching *parda* norms, Asghari rescues her husband’s family from a servant’s cheating, sets her husband on a satisfactory career path, and arranges a beneficial marriage for her husband’s sister, all the while carefully supervising the domestic management in her in-laws’ home.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, *Majalis un-Nissa* [Assemblies of Women] won a prize in 1874 for its author, the poet Khwāja Altaf Husain ‘Hāli’ (his pen-name Hāli means ‘modern’). Thereafter, it

boys’ education gradually shifted to schools and colleges, *pathshālas* and *madrasahs* (Metcalf 1982: chs 1 & 2). Educational credentials—though not to the exclusion of personal contacts—were becoming increasingly important for obtaining employment in the British administration (see, for instance, Lelyveld 1978: chs 1 & 2; Robinson 1993: 39ff.). Boys’ need to be educated in formal institutions (except for missionary schools) was not very controversial. The *content* of boys’ education was, however, for instance with respect to the language of instruction—English, Sanskrit, Persian or the vernaculars Hindi and Urdu.

<sup>47</sup> Sayyid Ahmad Khan is, of course, famed for his educational activities, especially founding the Muslim Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh (later Aligarh Muslim University or AMU) (Hasan 1998; Lelyveld 1978). He came to favour education in English, largely because it gave boys better access to government employment. Incidentally, he had been posted in Bijnor during 1857 and wrote an account of the events as he saw them from there.

<sup>48</sup> Nazir Ahmad was born in the 1830s in Rehar, a village near Afzalgarh, in Bijnor District. He had a lengthy career in the British administration, including being a deputy inspector of schools, and later deputy collector in the North West Provinces. He was renowned as a provocative and witty orator (Pritchett, 2001; Russell, 1992). Nazir Ahmad’s later book *Banāt un-Naʿsh* (about the girls’ school Asghari established) was also included in school syllabi. The title means ‘Daughters of the Bier’, the Urdu term for the constellation Ursa Major.

<sup>49</sup> The names Akbari and Asghari are probably ironic. Muslim families commonly give siblings paired names, here meaning ‘greater/older’ and ‘lesser/younger’, but Nazir Ahmad clearly sees ‘lesser’ as the superior woman.

was also used as a textbook for decades (Minault 1986b). The heroine, Zubaida *Khātūn*, is an educated and competent household manager like Asghari. The ‘assemblies’ present dialogues and discourses favouring women’s education and criticizing the propensity of uneducated women to fall prey to superstitions, unseemly speech and un-Islamic practices (Minault 1983s; 1986a; 1994).<sup>50</sup>

Nazir Ahmad and Hāli were both acquainted with other advocates of girls’ education, including some of Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s associates: Sayyid Karamat Husain, his student Sayyid Mumtaz Ali and Shaikh Abdullah (Khan 2001); see also (Ali 2000; Minault 1983b; 1990; 1992; 1993; 1998a).<sup>51</sup> Indeed several of them also produced tracts, magazines and advice books. Sayyid Mumtaz Ali wrote *Huquq un-Niswān* [The Rights of Women]. His second wife, Muhammadi Begum edited *Tahzīb un-Niswān* and wrote a biography of Bibi Ashraf (Minault 1990; 1992; Naim 1987). In 1905, Hāli’s poem *Chup kī dād* [Due Praise to the Silent] was published in *Khātūn* [Noble Woman], founded by Shaikh Abdullah and his wife (Minault 1983b; 1986b). And Nazir Ahmad’s nephew [his WBS] Rashid-ul Khairi founded *ʿAsmat* [Modesty] in 1908.<sup>52</sup> *ʿAsmat*, *Khātūn*, and *Tahzīb un-Niswān*, were the leading Urdu women’s magazines in the early twentieth century and their contents reflected ‘enlightened domesticity and respectability’ (Minault 1998b: 202). Articles discussed health, nutrition, practical housekeeping skills, and women’s wasteful social practices, and emphasized women’s importance in reproducing healthy and enlightened citizens, while maintaining respectability and *parda* rather than aping western women (Minault 1998a: Chapter 3).

Thanawi’s *Bihishti Zewar* [Heavenly Ornaments] is one of the most widely known advice books for women (Metcalf 1983; 1990; 1994). Thanawi used the drier format of an instruction manual rather than

<sup>50</sup> Altāf Husain ‘Hāli’ also had a career that included working in the British administration; he was working in Lahore at the Punjab Government Book Depot when he wrote *Majalis un-Nissa*.

<sup>51</sup> In 1906, Shaikh Abdullah founded the Aligarh Zenana Madrasa that eventually became the girls’ hostel at the Aligarh College. In Lucknow in 1912, Sayyid Karamat Husain founded a girls’ school, which is now named after him (Minault 1997). Sayyid Ahmad Khan advocated boarding schools for boys to enable them to break away from the supposedly stultifying atmosphere at home. By contrast, girls’ schools often found that the only way to attract pupils was to maintain an even stricter regime than home with regard to *parda*.

<sup>52</sup> Rashid-ul Khairi also wrote novels that Fatehali Devji (1994: 34) describes as examples of ‘reformist sado-masochism’ in which men mistreat women and suffer dreadful remorse afterwards. See also Minault 1989.

fiction and, unlike Nazir Ahmad, his educational schema did not include geography and other subjects that gave women a window on the wider world. He was more focused on suppressing customary practices and Islamizing women's religious activities than Nazir Ahmad and Hāli (Minault 1994). Thanawi believed everyone could be perfected through gaining knowledge and that individuals were responsible for correcting themselves. Women, however, were disadvantaged by their lack of education. Thus, *Bihishti Zewar* outlines religious teachings and criticizes ostentatious customs that people feel compelled to follow. Theological sources and 101 exemplary figures (the Prophet Muhammad and 100 virtuous Muslim women) provide authority for Thanawi's injunctions on matters such as *adab* [breeding, manners, etiquette] and *akhlāq* [ethics, virtues], child-rearing, domestic skills, proper pronunciation, and proper social hierarchy (for instance, between husband and wife).

This late nineteenth and early twentieth-century advice literature was one among many responses to the political, social and economical upheavals created in north India by British territorial annexations, the fall of the Mughal regime and the events of 1857. Discussions of its significance revolve around the relationship between gender and issues of community and class.<sup>53</sup>

### *Religious Purification*

In the early nineteenth century, a geographically mobile Muslim élite had consolidated its position in north India. They were over-represented in the colonial administration, a service gentry who took postings in different parts of British India. Typically, these families originated from *qasbahs* [small, generally Muslim dominated country towns] with which they retained their links. Often they were land-owners too, and had traditions of Islamic and legal learning (Bayly 1983: 346–368, 449–457). Several of Bibi Ashraf's male relatives, for instance, were in white-collar employment, including her husband, who was deputy inspector of schools in Jullundur (Punjab) before becoming an Arabic teacher in Government College, Lahore

<sup>53</sup> There is now an extensive literature around these topics and the role of European and north American women in various kinds of 'uplift' activities directed at Indian women in the 19th and early 20th centuries. See, for instance, Anagol 1998; Burton 1994; Dixon 1999; Forbes 1986/2000; Haggis 1998; 2000; Hancock 1999; Lal 1999; Savage 1997; Sinha 1998; 1999; Whitehead 1996.

(Naim 1987). After 1857, the Muslim élite lost their political figurehead—the deposed Mughal emperor—and the role of Islamic specialists [*qāzī*, *‘ulamā*] in the colonial government’s legal work declined. A widespread perception among Muslim urban élites in north India was that they had suffered a serious decline. Brass considers that this was not happening in north India (Brass 1974; 1991), while both Bayly and Robinson see a decline, at least for some sectors of the Muslim élite (Bayly 1983: 356; Robinson 1977; see Brass 1977 for his response to Robinson). Perhaps, however, *perceptions* are more salient here, and Bayly and Robinson would seem to agree with Brass that debates about religious reform (as well as about the role of Urdu in education) were defensive attempts by an entrenched Muslim élite to protect their privileges, especially their disproportionate representation in lucrative employment in the colonial administration, against encroachments by increasingly assertive Hindu élites.

The soul-searching turned inwards and responsibility for Muslims’ supposed plight was laid—in some way or other—at the feet of Muslims themselves.<sup>54</sup> Through the printed word and public debates, several schools of thought defined themselves in relation to other Muslims, as well as Hindus and Christians. Most notable for our purposes were the ‘modernists’ of the Aligarh movement (Hasan 1998; Lelyveld 1978) and the ‘revivalists’ of the *Daru’l Ulūm madrasah* in Deoband (founded in 1867) (Metcalf 1982), within both of whose ambits Bijnor District lies.<sup>55</sup> The Aligarh ‘modernists’ generally

<sup>54</sup> Political quietude and victim-blaming was a more common response than producing what might be construed as seditious critiques of the social, political and economic dislocations caused by British colonialism. The oppositional stance of the Tariqa-e Muhammadiyya led by Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (from Rai Barelli in Awadh rather than Barelli in Rohikhand) had already provided one cautionary tale. See Hardy 1972: especially ch. 2; Sanyal 1996: especially ch. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Ahmad (1967) provides a more general account of the modernists. For more on the various traditionalist movements, see Ahmad 1967: ch. 5; Hardy 1972: chs 3 and 4. Sanyal (1996) discusses the debates between the Ahl-e Sunnat (also known as Barelwis, after their leader Ahmad Riza Khan who lived in Barelli) with the Deobandis, the Ahl-e Hadis and the Nadwat al-‘ulamā or Nadwi in Lucknow. Generally, the Barelwis were more sympathetic to ‘folk religion’ (pilgrimages to Sufi shrines, popular customs connected with birth and marriage etc.). They had more influence in the rural areas than the Deobandis, and probably had few literates in their following, which may help to explain why few advice books similar to those discussed here seem to have emerged from this school of thought. In her survey of such material up to about 1980, Pernau refers to guides that reflect the positions of the Barelwis, the Ahl-e Hadis, the Jama‘at-ul Islam, the Chishti tradition, the Deobandis and the Tablighis, although writers cannot all be easily affiliated to one



favoured English education (alongside Urdu) as a means of enabling Muslims to access employment with the British authorities. They also advocated the reinterpretation of non-core aspects of Islam—needless to say, defining these was highly contentious—in the light of contemporary social and scientific knowledge. Nazir Ahmad and Hāli were allied with the Aligarh movement, and both had had extensive Islamic religious education. The ‘revivalists’ of Deoband favoured returning to the earlier texts and the traditions of the Prophet, now available in Urdu.<sup>56</sup> Thanawi was closely associated with Deoband and worked at one of its offshoot *madrasahs*, the *Mazāhir-i ‘Ulūm* in Saharanpur.

Despite their theological differences, ‘revivalist’ and ‘modernist’ thinkers were similar in seeing education as the means of rescuing Indian Muslims. Individual believers were responsible for obtaining correct religious knowledge, purifying their religious practice by expunging Indian and ‘un-Islamic’ customs, such as dowry and other extravagances, and putting their knowledge to use in their everyday lives. *Mirāt ul-‘Arūs*, *Majālīs un-Nissa* and *Bihishti Zewar* and other women’s advice literature, then, were integral to a larger corpus of Islamic reform literature that was not directed solely at women, one which implied a kind of ‘great tradition’ Islam shorn of its parochial referents that perhaps had particular appeal to a geographically mobile Muslim élite (Metcalf 1982: 252ff.).

In explaining Muslims’ situation in terms of their failures *qua Muslims* and focusing on correcting their religious practice, this literature was also implicated in the growth of more heightened communal awareness. Meanwhile, moreover, the educated Hindu service gentry were developing their own agenda for reform and improvement. Economic and political changes in western UP were tending to favour Hindu urban élites, particularly those associated with the

of these schools of thought. The Bareilwis were probably more concerned with westernisation as a possible consequence of education than with removing elements of ‘folk religion’ (Pernau 2002; Forthcoming, and personal communication). Even the rural areas of contemporary Bijnor, however, seem basically to be under Deobandi influence, with some students sent to Deoband to study and staff recruited there or from *madrasahs* connected with Deoband; the current *mohdamin* [superintendent] in Deoband is from Bijnor town.

<sup>56</sup> The distinction should not be overdrawn, however. Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s views on religion were very controversial and he had to remain in the background at Aligarh for fear of reducing the numbers of applicants too drastically. He and his close associates were well-versed in Islamic matters and men connected with Deoband and were sometimes employed in Aligarh, for instance the son-in-law of one of the Deoband founders was appointed ‘dean’ at Aligarh in 1893 (Lelyveld 1978: 192).



*ganj* towns [market trading centres with regular *bazārs*]. Hindu merchant corporations benefited from the enhanced trade that resulted from railway construction, increasing sales of agricultural produce as a result of expanding canal irrigation, and the rise in military purchasing after 1857 (Bayly 1983: 427–57). The introduction of modest electoral politics at the municipality level was advantageous for Hindu traders and moneylenders, rather than Hindu members of the Urdu service gentry (Robinson 1993: 46ff.). During the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, these Hindu urban élites assertively demanded the use of Devanagari script in official business and were central in Hindu reform movements.

From about 1870 onwards and into the twentieth century, a rich body of women's advice literature was also published in Devanagari and educational reform movements were being directed at Hindu women. Gupta (2002), Sangari (1999) and Orsini (2002) have all provided sustained accounts of the communal issues embedded in these advice literatures for women.<sup>57</sup> Sangari laments that parallels are often obscured by the separation of Hindi and Urdu scholarship, and her own discussion includes a direct comparison between Nazir Ahmad's *Mirāt ul-'Arūs* and Pandit Ramprasad Tiwari's Devanagari textbook for girls, *Rītī-ratnākar* [Jewel-mine of Customs] published in 1872 (Sangari 1999: 184–363). As with the Urdu genre, the earliest texts were generally written by men. Didactic dialogues and fictional stories portrayed 'good' and 'bad' women as stark contrasts, often in a markedly misogynist tone. The key women's magazines in Devanagari were *Strī Darpan* [The Mirror of Women] founded in 1909 and run by Nehru family women, *Grha-lakshmi* [Lakshmi of the Home] also founded in 1909, and *Chāmd* [Moon] founded in 1922 (Orsini 2002: 243–274; Talwar 1989).

Arya Samaj thinking, for instance, particularly attracted a Hindu élite entrenched in colonial employment, who perceived threats to their employment from other sectors of Punjabi society, such as Muslims. Although the Arya Samaj was strongest in Punjab, its influence spread to western UP and impacted on the Hindi move-

<sup>57</sup> Similar debates took place somewhat earlier in the 19th century in Bengal, for instance. Topics included the need to reform the domestic arena, the central importance of women in the home, the harking back to a Golden Age and the importance of removing unsuitable vulgarity from domestic practices and speech. See, for instance, Bagchi 1990; 1993; Banerjee 1989; Borthwick 1984; Bose 1995; Chakrabarty 1994; Chakravarti 1989; Chatterjee 1989; Karlekar 1986; 1991; 1994; Sarkar 2001; Sen 1993.

ment there (Jones 1976). Education would remove ignorance about religion and enhance Hindus' sense of national identity. Splits in the Samaj between 'militants' and 'moderates' over the balance between 'tradition' and western 'modernity' were reflected (among other things) in different educational institutions, *gurukuls* and the Dayan-and Anglo-Vedic (DAV) colleges. Yet, approaches to girl's education—which was a novel and important theme from the 1880s onwards—seem to have been similar. Exemplary women in the (mythical) Aryan past provided role models, and contemporary women were to create homes akin to those of the Aryan age. The 'good Hindu' woman was not contaminated by (and especially not converted to) Christianity. Girls were to become enlightened, but not westernized—and girls' education should not threaten domestic gender hierarchies. Arya Samaj schools and *gurukuls* not only prevented excessive westernization, but increasingly accentuated Hindu–Muslim distinctiveness. By this time, Urdu was widely seen as the language of Muslim invaders and had also become increasingly associated with unsuitably erotic poetry. Thus girls were taught in Hindi, since Hindu religious texts were written in Devanagari and Sanskrit.<sup>58</sup> The curricula also featured narratives of Indian history and the periodization of Hindi literature that tended to demonize Muslims. Ills suffered by Hindu women—such as *parda*—were blamed on Muslim invaders and the Golden age was prior to the Muslim interregnum (Datta 1998; Jones 1976: 103–8; 1988; Kishwar 1986; 1989).

### *Class Distinction*

Religious reform movements, Hindu and Muslim alike, clearly affected communal politics. Further, juxtaposing the Urdu and Hindi advice literatures also highlights class politics. The life styles of the landed *nawābī* élite were typified by leisure, conspicuous consumption and the decadent pleasures of wine, courtesans and song. The westernized *nouveaux riches* aped the colonists. The hallmark of educated

<sup>58</sup> Boys, however, continued to be taught in Urdu (and possibly also in English) into the twentieth century, for employment purposes. See King 1989; 1992 for discussions of the contrasting moral qualities attributed to Hindi and Urdu. Many Muslims also feared exposing girls to erotic poetry in Urdu. On the other hand, advocates of Urdu both then and now often assert that Urdu encompasses within itself good manners and refinement.

service-gentry respectability, by contrast, was to be purified religion and refinement, hard work and restrained budgeting, and the refashioning of women (Joshi 2001). As Joshi also indicates, the urban middle classes distinguished themselves from their inferiors too. Similarly, Orsini, Gupta and Sangari all emphasize how the advice literature often betrayed disdain for popular culture and a fear of the lower orders.<sup>59</sup> This required ‘drawing a strong line between the respectable woman in the house (the *bhadramahilā*) and the relatively less-shackled and economically independent lower-class woman in the street’ (Orsini 2002: 261). Respectable women should reduce traders’ access to their homes, and stop participating in public fairs and syncretic ceremonies at shrines. Ceasing to employ various service groups—for instance at weddings—would inculcate habits of frugality and remove religious impurity, frivolity and vulgarity. Lewd songs should no longer be sung at birth and wedding ceremonies. Women should excise coarse turns of phrase from their daily speech. Minault points to embourgeoisement alongside erasures of syncretic religious practice in Muslim and Hindu reform movements alike, with which Sangari and Gupta concur (Minault 1993; 1998a: 95 ff.). If Hindu women should behave according to *maryādā* [decorum, decency, rectitude, dignity], Muslim women were to follow *adab* [etiquette] and *akhlāq* [moral virtues]. The vocabulary was somewhat distinctive, but the intent seems to have been one and the same: respectable women should shield themselves and their families from contamination by the poor.<sup>60</sup>

Sangari cites *Strī Updesh: Do Ladkiyon kī Kahānī* [Advice for Women: A story about two girls] by Munshi Ahmad Husain, published in 1873 at the behest of one Pandit Gokulchand for use in a Farsi *madrasah*. Sangari sees this as an instance of ‘brahmin–ashraf collaboration’ and ‘patriarchal commonalities’ (Sangari 1999: 239 ff.). The story

<sup>59</sup> Again, this was a much wider project. Although she is largely silent on gender issues, Goopu (2001) provides a detailed account of the urban middle class moral panic in inter-war United Provinces that was reflected in residential segregation, public health measures, stringent policing and religious reform. She explores the implications of these moves for the mobilization of the urban poor, Untouchables, low caste Hindus and Muslims. Similarly, Hansen (1992) examines the very popular Nautankī theatre, including middle class efforts to reform it.

<sup>60</sup> Alternatively, women could turn their homes into schools as much for their servants as their children, and engage in social ‘uplift’. In Nazir Ahmad’s *Mirāt ul-‘Arūs*, for instance, Akbari foolishly mixes with people from the lower orders—and pays the penalty. Her prudent younger sister Asghari is praised for being selective, both in her social contacts and later in the pupils she admits to the school she founded in her in-laws’ home.

locates the 'fall' well before the Muslim interregnum and creates an un-marked 'Indian' woman to highlight the deterioration suffered by *all* women in India. For Sangari, reform agendas 'functioned to *school* women as status markers and class agents' (305, emphasis in original). The 'acquisition of moral and wifely power for reformed women rested not on othering women from different denominations but on othering women "below". However, *through* this, women were being used to mark more generalized enclosures of "hinduness" and "muslimness"' (209, emphasis in original). Similarly, Gupta sees reforming the domestic arena and the 'sanitising of women's social spaces' as a class project (Gupta 2002: Chs 3 and 4). 'Respectability' entailed withdrawing respectable women from popular culture, and disciplining and cleansing their cultural world. The 'Hindu civilizing mission' and 'cultural proselytising' (105), however, often entailed anti-Muslim hate speech and inflammatory tracts, (pre-Muslim) Golden Age narratives and moral panics about the predatory intent of Muslim men towards Hindu women (irrespective of class) (Gupta 2002: Chs 6 and 7; see also Chandra 1992: Ch. 3; Chatterjee 1995: Chs 4 and 5).

Sangari and Gupta both consider that the intertwining and cross-cutting of religious purity and class distinction in the advice literature simultaneously hampered the development of unified classes and of homogenized religious communities. Indeed, Bayly considers that impediments to the development of a unified middle class were already prefigured in the long-standing separation between the spheres of operation of the (Muslim) *qasbah* and (Hindu) *ganj* élites, although that separation was not often reflected in communal tension in the late nineteenth century (Bayly 1983: 367–8, 426, 449ff). Certainly, this all suggests a potent brew of communal and class politics, with similar class snobberies endorsed by a Hindu service gentry anxious for their own employment prospects, by aspiring and assertive Hindu business élites experiencing a rise in their fortunes, and by educated Muslim urban élites fearing downward mobility.

### *Reformed Womanhood*

The advice literature was a discourse about women predominantly authored by men. Moreover, it displayed an 'astonishing consensus' about the ideal reformed woman (Sangari 1999: 306). Even in the face of differing images of women—traditional heroines [Sita,

Savitri], women volunteers in public service [*svayamsevikā*] or brave historical women [*vīrāṅganā*]<sup>61</sup>—Hindu reformers did not offer a serious alternative to the educated, yet secluded, wife in the home. She would enhance domestic happiness, but not upset domestic hierarchies. She was to become an efficient homemaker and reformed housewife [*grihastinī*].<sup>62</sup> The *strī upyogī sāhitya* ['literature useful for women'] emphasized competent domestic management, cleanliness, time-management, frugality, careful accounting and the avoidance of costly (especially non-Hindu) practices. Hard-working educated mothers would be skilled teachers of healthy children (Orsini 2002: 289 ff.). Likewise, Muslim reformers did not question the gender division of labour and of space. The Urdu prescriptive literature directed at women was an intrusion into women's space—the *zenāna*—over which men could normally exercise rather little control or surveillance. This intrusion was warranted, however, by women's supposed ignorance, extravagance and impiety that rendered them inadequate mothers. Muslims' future in India rested on equipping women to create proper domestic environments in which to raise children. The newly reformed woman, whether Hindu or Muslim, was to shoulder considerable responsibility for the cleansing that had to be achieved: expunging religious impurities, gentrifying the manners and refining the language of their family members, and creating hygienic and ordered domestic environments.<sup>63</sup>

The late nineteenth-century discourses about Indian society in general, as well as about the 'woman question', were characterized

<sup>61</sup> For more on the *vīrāṅganā* see Hansen 1988/2000.

<sup>62</sup> As Nita Kumar notes in her discussions of girls' schooling in Banaras, advocating girls' education for domesticity presented a dilemma about how to staff the schools where girls were to be taught: how were women teachers to be recruited without threatening *their* reputations? The solution often seems to have been to employ widows who could not be wives and mothers like the girls in their charge. See N. Kumar 1994; 1996; 2000: ch. 6.

<sup>63</sup> The 'reformed woman' was not a creature envisioned only by religious reformers. For instance, Gupta (2002: 167), suggests that the early 20th century government curriculum was just as gender-biased, and endorsed ideas of womanhood similar to those prominent in 'religious' schools, *contra* Kumar (1994; 1996) who claims that schools aiming to produce future mothers of the nation would fail because they overloaded their curricula by adopting the government syllabus and adding in optional religious education. In like manner, despite an emphasis on women as workers, similar notions of the reformed (middle class) woman and her role in the family—shorn of many overt forms of religiosity, yet still with a Hindu tinge—were contained within the 1938 report on Woman's Role in Planned Economy (Banerjee 1998; Chaudhuri 1996). Arguably, such views are still central and taken-for-granted aspects of gender roles that have been incorporated into social policy in general and 'secular' schooling in particular in the post-1947 period.

by an ambivalence and contradictoriness inherent in 'derivative discourse' (Chandra 1992; Chatterjee 1986; 1995; Joshi 2001: 59–95). In some measure, women's advice literature was responding to hostile colonial and missionary discourses that portrayed Indian women as the 'backward' victims of cruel traditions. We may also presume that women's roles in moral and domestic labour portrayed in the prize-winning books patronized by the state were at least approved, if not actively promoted. One of Nazir Ahmad's plots on such themes was possibly based on a Defoe novel. At the same time, Golden Age myths provided respite from the 'oppressive present' of colonial subjugation (Chandra 1992) and many of the idioms and issues had clear local roots. Aspects of the Urdu debates, for instance, reflect a distinctively Islamic heritage, including personal restraint for men and women alike, overcoming *nafs* [undisciplined impulses] through the cultivation of *'aql* [intelligence, sense], and the inherent *spiritual* equality of men and women (Metcalf 1990: Introduction). References to a glorious departed era—pre-Islamic Aryan or the early days of Islam—when women were educated and respected enabled the lamentable contemporary situation to be interpreted as a remediable deviation, not evidence that Indian civilization was inherently inferior. Appeals to 'tradition' could facilitate not only critique of the 'civilizing mission' that served to justify colonial intrusion into everyday Indian life but also self-respect in the face of colonial contemptuousness. In discussing the Lucknow middle class, for instance, Joshi prefers to see a complex mix of colonial and local influences on their thinking about gender issues (Joshi 2001: 59–95). On the one hand, the 'modern' woman in the home was characterized by rational, efficient domesticity, hard work and thrift, all of which suggest direct colonial influences.<sup>64</sup> Yet the reformed woman was to be morally and spiritually superior to western women: rather than becoming westernized herself, she was to display 'traditional' qualities of wifely subservience and modesty.<sup>65</sup> Some aspects of western civilization attracted, others were rejected in favour of

<sup>64</sup> Chatterjee (1989) argued that the 'resolution' of the woman question rested on associating the home with women, spirituality and a rejection of the modern, but this seems problematic here: efficient domesticity, much like the then nascent 'home science', was surely a product of western 'modernity' and it was constantly reiterated in the women's advice literature.

<sup>65</sup> Such 'fractured modernity', Joshi argues, was also reflected in middle class claims to equality on the basis of merit with their erstwhile superiors, at the same time as they insisted on their own superiority over others in terms of caste status and pollution.

'traditions' from some long-gone Golden Age. As Jones felicitously put it: 'The ideal Sita, the traditional Hindu wife, lived uneasily with the concept of a modernised, educated women striding forward into a Vedic past' (Jones 1976: 108).

Contentious though the woman question undoubtedly was, we need to enter a note of caution here. Even if religious reformers claimed to be speaking *for* their community, it is not clear that they were speaking *to* all its members. The language debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries simultaneously accentuated communal and class distinctions. There was a 'dual divergence' between increasingly Sanskritized Hindi written in Devanagari and increasingly Persianized Urdu written in Persian script, and between these two and the diverse, un-standardized and less high-flown languages of the masses (Brass 1974: 134). Debates about language and religious reform reflected the concerns of particular sectors of the urban élites, not Hindus and Muslims as a whole (King 1989; 1994: 173 ff.). Some of the advice literature that emanated from these quarters apparently sold exceptionally well: *Mirāt ul-'Arūs* had sold around 100,000 copies by 1888 (Russell 1992: 265), when only about one million of the 40 million residents of North-Western Provinces were literate (Lelyveld 1978: 66–7).<sup>66</sup> We do not know how many non-literates listened to it being read and nor do we know how its audience interpreted it (see Appendix for more on this). Girls' formal education was still not widely endorsed or in evidence. Educational institutions for girls were few and student numbers remained small until at least the 1920s. Widows and female orphans might attend schools, often mission schools, to enable them to earn a living, so school textbooks might have had a wider reach through that channel. Opposition to women's economic independence and concerns about the infringement of *parda* meant that girls in respectable families—Hindu as well as Muslim—were unlikely to leave their homes for educational purposes. Even being educated at home might be achieved only in the face of considerable opposition. And poor and rural girls were largely excluded from whatever formal education

<sup>66</sup> We should also note, however, that the expansion of print technology enabled the publication of diverse styles of literature, some of which also sold extremely well. These included romances and materials that the British authorities deemed obscene, as well as other aspects of popular culture from which reformers wished to keep women insulated. Thus, women were (at least) potentially exposed to contradictory messages (for more on this, see Gupta 2002: especially ch. 2; Sangari 1999).



there was (Minault 1998b; Orsini 2002: 260). By the early twentieth century, seminaries such as Deoband had begun developing networks of outreach to the rural areas (Metcalf 1982: 248). Thus it is possible that some rural boys were exposed to these advice literatures, but probable that the reach of these texts was narrow and that notions of the 'reformed woman' did not spread far beyond the mainly urban 'vernacular élite'.

### Community, Class and Gender

In Bijnor today, most *madrasah* managers are prominent and relatively wealthy members of their locality. Most male teachers come from similar backgrounds and trained at Deoband or other large *madrasahs*, whilst the few teachers from impoverished backgrounds had generally boarded in seminaries from an early age. Women teachers mainly come from the urban lower middle classes, but had usually studied more informally. The continuity in moral vision—religious purification, gentrification and reformed domestic management—between the nineteenth and early twentieth-century textbooks and advice books and the contemporary textbooks such as *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* is striking. Herein lies our problematic, for the wider social and political context differs significantly from the earlier period.

Chatterjee argues that the 'woman question' was resolved in colonial India by reserving reform of the inner, spiritual domestic sphere associated with women for the 'community' rather than the colonial state. After 1947, legislative interventions to reform this sphere remained problematic for minority communities, 'since, to the extent that the dominant cultural formation among them considers the community excluded from the state, a new colonial relation is brought into being' (Chatterjee 1989: 249–52; 1995: 132–4). Indeed, many Muslims in contemporary Bijnor talk about the replacement of 'Angrezi Raj' with a 'Hindu Raj' in 1947. Widespread Muslim hostility to the government's high profile family planning campaigns, especially during the Emergency, and the controversy sparked by the Shah Bano case in the 1980s are notable instances of minority leaders' efforts to keep the state from intruding into 'private' community matters. Nevertheless, a combination of Hindu élite politicking and the action (or inaction) of the postcolonial Indian state (itself dominated by upper caste Hindus) has had a



direct bearing on the everyday lives of minorities, such as Muslims, in many ways. Here we focus on the communal politics of language and the decline of Urdu in the contemporary public arena in UP; on the UP state's role in providing formal education and the recent growth in non-state institutions (including *madrasahs*); and on some aspects of communal politics in 1990s, especially in relation to *madrasahs*. These issues provide a backdrop against which to view the education of rural Muslim girls and the class and gendered projects integral to *madrasah* curricula.

### *Hindi and Urdu*

Brass comments that Hindus and Muslims in the early nineteenth century used different languages for speaking to their deities but had a common language for communicating with one another. Initially, the language debates were largely a matter of different scripts—Devanagari and Persian—but Hindi and Urdu gradually became 'symbolic links among members of the same ethnic group, barriers to communication between members of different ethnic groups, and additional marks of identity and separateness for such groups' (Brass, 1991: 85). Despite a 1900 government resolution permitting the use of Hindi script in official business, only by about 1930 did Hindi oust Urdu in the Persian script from its prime position among the vernacular languages in official business and in publications. Orsini details the development of 'the Hindi establishment' that was central in expanding the numbers of publications in Devanagari script during the early twentieth century (Orsini 2002). The individuals involved were often employed by the British in education administration and came to dominate Hindi curriculum development and the expansion of Hindi teaching in schools and colleges. Other writers were key players in publishing houses (with clear financial interests in gaining contracts for textbook publication).

The trajectories already in evidence in education by the early twentieth century have been consolidated since 1947. Among Gandhi's views on language politics was the advocacy of 'Hindustani', as a mass language that combined Hindi and Urdu, but this attracted little support (Brass 1974: 135–6; Lelyveld 1993; 2002). Sanskritized Hindi has been increasingly dominant in the public sphere in UP, where it is the official language and is now an essential qualification for obtaining white-collar employment. The 'institutional

stranglehold' (Orsini 2002: 382) of the Hindi establishment over education has ossified UP Education Board Hindi literature courses. The linguistic content of the curriculum emphasizes highly Sanskritized Hindi, the language of the educated 'vernacular élite'. This exclusionary class project marginalizes and denigrates the vernacular non-élite forms of Hindi spoken by most villagers and the poor (Kumar 1991; 1993; Orsini 2002; Rai 2001). It also has implications for communal politics. The UP school syllabi include science, geography, civics and so forth. There is no formal timetabling of religious instruction in most schools. Nevertheless, Sanskrit itself is associated with the Hindu scriptures, and the Hindi literature courses still contain narratives of Indian history, mythology and Hindi literature in which Muslims are portrayed in a negative light. The Hindu bias of the syllabus has long been a matter of concern to Muslim commentators (see, for instance, Brass 1974). Yet the Hindi syllabus has not been central to the recent debates about NCERT textbooks and school syllabi more generally, which have focused on History, Social Science, and Vedic Mathematics and Astrology (Sahmat 2001; 2002a; 2002b).

Meanwhile, Urdu has suffered a precipitate decline from its earlier prominence in north Indian public life.<sup>67</sup> It was used by the British administration well into the twentieth century, and remained an official language in UP in the British period. By the early twentieth century, Urdu had become an important symbol of Muslim culture and Islam for north Indian Muslims. Since 1947, however, debates over Urdu have been contaminated by bitterness among many Hindus in UP over Partition: Urdu is widely seen as an alien language and a threat to national unity. Muslims are still the largest religious minority in UP (17.5% in the state as a whole) (Census of India 1991), yet Urdu ceased to be an official language of the state in 1951 and was relegated to 'minority language' status. Repeated efforts by organizations such as Anjuman Taraqqi-e Urdu and Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat to get Urdu recognized as UP's second official language have met with resistance from the UP state, as well as legal interventions from Hindi language advocates such as the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. Constitutional guarantees provide for 'mother tongue' teaching for minorities at primary school level even

<sup>67</sup> For more on the contemporary position of Urdu in UP, see: Abdullah 2002; Ahmad 2002; Brass 1974: 119–274; 1990: 135ff.; 1991: 69–108; Farouqui 1994; Latifi 1999; Pai 2002; Rahman 2002: 198–262; Russell 1996b; Venkatachaliah 1999.

for languages not defined as ‘official’, and several government committees have investigated the role of Urdu teaching in schools at all levels (e.g. the Kripalani and Gujral Committees, established in 1961 and 1972 respectively). Despite this, Urdu is now marginal in the UP curriculum. Under the ‘three language formula’ as applied to UP (Hindi, English and another Indian language), Urdu might have achieved some prominence in school curricula, but Sanskrit is generally taken as the third language.<sup>68</sup> Urdu as a literary subject—including fiction and poetry—is rarely an option in secondary schools. As a *medium of instruction*, Urdu is now largely restricted to the *madrasah* sector. In the 1990s, Urdu became an optional subject in some (Hindi-medium) government primary schools. Many Muslims in Bijnor, however, consider the move a political ploy by Mayavati and Mulayam Singh Yadav in their competition for Muslim votes, rather than a commitment to Urdu. There was also widespread cynicism about the qualifications of staff appointed to teach Urdu. Some commentators talk of ‘step-motherly’ [*sic*] treatment of Urdu by the state, others criticize Muslim urban élites for complacency, political naivety and abandoning Urdu in favour of Hindi for their own children’s education. For whatever reason—murder, suicide or both (Rahman 2002: 234–5)—Urdu has been a casualty in the post-1947 period.

The situation is not simply a straight contest between Hindi and Urdu, however. Throughout the colonial period, English had the prestige of the language used in the upper reaches of the colonial administration. Indians’ access to it, however, was very limited. In the immediate post-1947 period, English presented policy dilemmas, as an international language yet part of the colonial heritage. Given the problems of determining a single national language for India, English occupied that position (initially only as an interim measure) (Brass 1990: 135ff.). Kumar, Orsini and Rai tend to emphasize the dominance of Sanskritized Hindi over non-élite language. By contrast, Deshpande (2000), Mohan (2000) and Srivastava (2000) are more concerned with Hindi in relation to English. In a time of globalization, English is increasingly important as the language of

<sup>68</sup> There is an additional irony here. The Hindi movement emphasized Hindi’s Sanskrit roots and was able to bring Sanskrit into prominence as a school subject. By contrast, the Urdu movement has Persianized Urdu at the same time as virtually eclipsing Persian. Persian has an insignificant presence as a modern foreign language in the UP school curricula and is taught only to the most advanced *madrasah* pupils.

upward mobility in the employment market, in India and abroad. English-medium schools, however, are expensive and exclusive and competence in English is out of reach of the majority. In the language stakes, then, Urdu has been marginalized not only by Sanskritized Hindi but also by English.

### *Schools and Madrasahs*

These linguistic trajectories have been accompanied by important changes in educational provision. Hindi- and Urdu-medium government schools were established in the nineteenth century, but periodic retrenchments of government expenditures plus Muslim and Hindu fears of conversions in missionary and government schools provided opportunities for non-state schools, often founded by caste or sectarian organizations.

Since the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919, education—along with health—has been a provincial responsibility. Since 1947, the UP state has accorded education a low priority in its spending. Indeed, by the 1990s, evidence had accumulated of the UP state's abject failure to provide comprehensive, accessible, affordable, and good quality schools. In the face of growing cohorts of school-age children, there are too few government schools and teachers to meet the potential demand. Rural schools in particular remain insufficient in number, and their buildings and teaching materials are more inadequate than in urban schools. Rural primary schools are least well resourced. Further, in the 1950s and 1960s, the Hindu urban middle classes and dominant landowning castes could influence the location of schools via their connections (often through relatives) into an educational officialdom dominated by upper caste Hindus. Like the lower Hindu castes and the Scheduled Castes, Muslims did not have such ready means of leverage over the 'Hindi establishment'. Between 1960 and 1990, teachers' unions pressurized the state government to nationalize schools (a trend that has now been reversed, especially in the secondary sector). The salaries of teachers—overwhelmingly upper caste Hindu—still on the government payroll now account for the lion's share of the education budget, especially since the pay rises mandated by the 5th pay commission. This skewing of the education budget has subsidized the urban middle classes at the expense of expanding the number of schools and teachers serving the rural population and the poor

(Kingdon and Muzammil 2001). In any case, the 1990s saw a decline in real per capita expenditure on education by the UP state and a fall in the numbers of teachers per capita (Drèze and Gazdar 1997; Drèze and Sen 2002: 143–88; Srivastava 2001; The Probe Team 1999). In rural schools, moreover, high levels of teacher absenteeism and shirking compound the general problem of recruiting staff for rural posts. In practice, too, government schools rarely provide free education. There is, however, little accountability from below or overt public protest about the quality of state schooling.

Since the mid-1980s, shifts in the wider economy to market liberalization have been reflected in the massive expansion of private and government-aided schools and colleges, either wholly or partially outside the state sector. These may compensate somewhat for the shortfall in state provision—but in a fashion that further reduces pressure on the state and fails to address questions of equitable access (Jeffery *et al.* Forthcoming-b). These educational institutions normally rely on fees and other levies (e.g. 'donations' to obtain admission).<sup>69</sup> Since parents are responsible for funding children's schooling, founders are mindful of locating their school where it can expect to remain afloat financially. Consequently, private and government-aided schools are few and far between in the rural areas (Drèze and Gazdar 1997: 71; NCERT 1997: Table V 41), and tend not to be sited in predominantly Muslim areas, in part because Muslims are disproportionately located in the lowest rungs of the urban and rural class hierarchies (Shariff 1995).<sup>70</sup> The upshot is that government and non-state schools alike, particularly secondary schools, have tended to be constructed disproportionately in or near areas dominated by caste Hindus (NCERT 1997: Table V 17), where there are sufficient concentrations of urban middle class families, or wealthy families from the immediate hinterland.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, most schools are Hindi-medium. In Bijnor and its environs, few schools are explicitly Hindu foundations, but textbooks and lessons are not the only medium through which religion is 'taught'.

<sup>69</sup> Often, individuals established these institutions, but official recognition requires them to be 'Friendly Societies', which many are only on paper.

<sup>70</sup> This can also be said of Scheduled Castes, who typically occupy the lowest economic positions.

<sup>71</sup> As well as paying fees, wealthy rural families may provide public or even personal transport for their children, or arrange for their children to board with urban relatives. English-medium schools generally charge much higher fees than Hindi mediums schools. Faust & Nagar (2001) discuss the socially and politically divisive implications of English-medium schooling.

While Arya Samaj and RSS schools have an explicit agenda, other schools—government schools included—exhibit ‘banal Hinduism’, the taken-for-granted yet insidious practices that tend to construct an upper caste Hindu ambience (cf. Billig 1995). In most schools, daily assemblies and other functions, such as Founders’ Days and January 26th celebrations, are replete with Hindu iconography and Sanskritized Hindi (cf. Bénéï 2000). There is, then, no need for children from poor and marginalized communities—such as Muslims and SCs—to attend Arya Samaj or RSS schools to be exposed to educational regimes that denigrate and humiliate them (Balagopalan and Subramanian 2003; Kumar 1989: 59–77; 1993). In Bijnor town several schools were also founded by Muslim or mixed religion committees. But they are all Hindi-medium and follow the UP curriculum; one also has an English-medium stream. Urdu is offered in the three largest Muslim-run institutions and a few other schools, as either the second or the third language, either optionally (to a handful of students) or compulsorily. In other words, state and non-state schools have marked class and urban biases in access, and a widespread Hindu ambience. The shortage of schools in rural areas—whether government or non-state—confronts the rural poor with immense problems accessing the contemporary schooling market in western UP, as they cannot readily pay school fees, or transport and other costs. Such is the context in which *madrasahs* operate today as part of the non-state sector.<sup>72</sup>

In the immediate period after 1947, Muslims in western UP suffered a general decline in their relative economic and political position, in part because of excess migration of the urban and rural élites, including many of those associated with the Aligarh school, to Pakistan (Brass 1974: 182ff.). Those Muslims who remained in India have been (in general) economically marginalized (Shariff 1995). Nevertheless, some sectors of the Muslim population have directly or indirectly benefited from developments in the agricultural sector since the 1960s. The increasing numbers of *madrasahs* in Bijnor town as well as in the district’s rural areas in 1980s and 1990s may be attributable to this, as well as to larger numbers of school-age children and a growing demand for formal education from Muslim parents. Crucially, *madrasah* funding relies on subscriptions rather than fees, and local initiatives can establish *madrasahs* and possibly extend

<sup>72</sup> For more on *madrasahs* in Bijnor and of the views of parents and *madrasah* staff, see Jeffery *et al.* Forthcoming-a.

their collection networks further afield if enough Muslim traders and landowners are making only a modest surplus.<sup>73</sup> For parents, the choice of *madrasah* education is primarily a matter of inadequate alternative educational provision and the low direct costs: it is a feasible recourse for those whose lack of resources leaves them little room for manoeuvre in planning their children's educational careers (Engineer 2001; Sikand 2001b).<sup>74</sup>

Some urban English-educated Muslims have accused *madrasahs* of obscurantism and of failing to equip Muslim children with the credentials and skills necessary in today's labour market.<sup>75</sup> Certainly, *madrasahs* generally provide only a very limited education, but this is primarily because of erratic and often poor funding, a problem they share with government schools and smaller non-state schools, but not with the exclusive and expensive private schools in towns. The ability of *madrasahs* to 'modernize' by introducing subjects such as science and computing, and even Hindi and English, is constrained by finances. Thus, Urdu, Arabic, Farsi and Islamic subjects occupy prominent positions in most *madrasah* curricula. Unlike school Hindi, however, Urdu is no longer a strong currency in the employment market. Some knowledge of Arabic might help prospective migrants to the Gulf. Higher training in Islamic subjects may open the way to posts such as *maulwī* or *imām*, one of the very few ways in which those versed in Islamic subjects can use their education directly and in a respected (though not lucrative) fashion. But this route is taken only by a narrow section of *madrasah* pupils: *madrasahs* usually cater for young children, most of whom leave formal education by the age of 14 at the latest. Boys usually attend *madrasahs* for a few years only, before being expected to obtain employment or work on the family farm. Indeed, given the overall economic position of Muslims in rural

<sup>73</sup> Other poor communities, such as Scheduled Castes, have generally not developed such widespread alternatives to the state system along the lines of *madrasahs*. In Bijnor District, for instance, there are few Ambedkar Schools, although SCs comprised 21% of the population of the district in 1991. For SCs, this is partly attributable to the scholarships to which they are entitled in government schools, but they also seem to lack networks with the geographical and economic spread of some Muslim networks and cannot fund such institutions for themselves.

<sup>74</sup> Children from moderately wealthy Muslim backgrounds—mainly urban, but sometimes rural too—are much more likely to attend a school than a *madrasah*. At school, they will probably follow the UP Board Hindi-medium curriculum or an English-medium curriculum. They may read the *Qur'ān Sharīf* and learn Urdu from a private tutor or by attending a *madrasah* before or after school.

<sup>75</sup> See Ahmad 2002. There have also been numerous articles to this effect in *Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *Milli Gazette* and *Muslim India*.

western UP, is perhaps surprising that so many Muslim children are in formal education in *madrasahs*, even if only for a few years.

Rightly, Muslim parents did not perceive *madrasah* education as an effective route to social mobility. It is not a passport to prestigious, well-paid employment—but they said the same of the rural schools to which they had access. Many rural Muslim parents—especially the poor—did not believe that their sons could make a successful transition from *any* kind of formal education into secure white-collar employment, because they lacked the necessary social contacts and financial resources (Jeffery and Jeffery 1997: 179ff.). *Madrasah* staff regarded their work as one of religious merit [*sawāb*] because *madrasahs* provided morally improving education for their pupils. Not only were schools geographically and financially inaccessible for poor rural children, but Muslim parents and *madrasah* staff alike also considered their formal curricula to be devoid of ethical content and their ambience to be unsympathetic to Islam. In an uncertain and often hostile world, *madrasah* education could provide some dignity and self-respect by giving parameters for the moral life in this world and an assurance of reward in the afterlife, if not in this one. The emphasis on self-improvement and personal reform, however, is a defensive and introverted strategy that poses no direct challenge to the structures that perpetuate Muslims' educational and occupational marginalization in UP.

### *Madrasahs and 'communal' politics*

In 1990, Bijnor experienced 'riots' connected with the Ayodhya dispute (Basu 1994; Jeffery and Jeffery 1994b). Many Muslims also talk about the communal bias in more day-to-day matters, such as access to government health and education facilities (Jeffery and Jeffery 1999). Rhetorical attacks on Muslims (for instance for their approach to family limitation) are commonplace (Jeffery and Jeffery 2002). Even before September 11th 2001, and more so since then, the media accuse Muslims of being unpatriotic, 'backward' and socially and religiously conservative. Now that *madrasahs* are filling some of the unmet demand for schooling, they have been repeatedly vilified. Several kinds of state intervention have been proposed: to regulate and inspect them, to oversee their curricula and to insist that they are registered with the government. And proponents of the Hindu Right see *madrasahs* as training grounds for Islamic funda-



mentalists and terrorists, or as hideouts for the banned SIMI (Students Islamic Movement of India), for Pakistani spies and for arms stashes (Godbole 2001; P. Kumar 2000; Sikand 2001a).<sup>76</sup>

Such allegations, however, are wide of the mark as far as Bijnor *madrasahs* are concerned. The *madrasahs* were not military academies and we saw little indication that *madrasah* staff deliberately foster religious intolerance and arrogance. Bigotry and militancy are not the inevitable companions of piety. On the contrary, *madrasah* staff often commented on the variety of legitimate ways to learn about morality and spiritual matters, and *madrasah* pupils were involved in patriotic ceremonies on Republic Day and frequently reminded of their duties and loyalties to their country of birth. Nevertheless, educating significant numbers of Muslim children separately from those of other communities provides all too few opportunities for inter-faith dialogue and all too many for Muslims and *madrasahs* to be demonized (Sikand 2001b). Studying separately may entrench children’s perception of particularistic and distinctive identities on both sides of the Hindu–Muslim divide, especially in the current hostile political and economic climate. In other words, *madrasahs* may be fostering the reinforcement of the very processes of exclusion and separation to which *madrasah* education was a response (Ahmad 2000).

### *Class, Gender and Madrasahs*

*Madrasah* education and Urdu have largely become a residualized option for poor Muslims—a remarkable change from the earlier prestige of those learned in Urdu (and Farsi and Arabic), the religious scholars and lawyers, the urban élites and literati. On the other hand, the aspects of ‘reform’ evidenced in the *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* hint at some continuities. Chatterjee’s comments on Muslims’ ‘new colonial relation’ in contemporary India are suggestive here (Chatterjee 1989: 249–52; 1995: 132–4). In the mid nineteenth century, Muslims (as well as Hindus) were on the receiving end of colonial commentaries on the status of women. Since 1947, Muslims in India have faced repeated allegations about their purported ‘back-

<sup>76</sup> *Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *Amar Ujāla*, and the RSS weekly *Organiser* have carried numerous news and comment articles on this subject over the past couple of years.

wardness' and 'conservatism', particularly with respect to education and the position of women, that time-honoured index of 'civilization'. Urban middle class Muslim girls today, however, are likely to attend Hindi-medium schools, where there is little emphasis on specifically *Islamic* moral education, gentrification and domestication. We are still dealing with an urban middle class project of reform—a civilizing mission—in which gender issues are central. But the pressures for internal Muslim reform are now primarily directed at poor and rural Muslim girls in *madrasahs*.

*Madrasah* funding suggests snobberies within the Muslim community and embarrassment that the failings of poor and illiterate Muslims reflect badly on Indian Muslims as a whole. In some measure, *madrasahs* can be read as part of a class project aimed at 'uplifting' Muslims, training some boys to become *maulwīs* and hoping to turn many others into good Muslims and responsible, honest citizens. Educating girls is central to this project and the *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* was often a core text in this endeavour. *Madrasah* staff endorsed its moral vision and saw educated mothers—children's 'first *madrasahs*'—as vital allies in their 'civilizing mission'. Parental ambitions revolved primarily around arranging 'good' marriages for their daughters, and nowadays some education is an asset in the marriage market because boys are said to want educated brides, even if they are not highly educated themselves. Both agendas could be more readily achieved if girls knew the basics of Islamic practice and belief, were demure and well behaved, could keep house competently and had been educated under circumstances that did not enable gossips to cast slurs on their family's honour. Rural Muslim girls in *madrasahs* were being groomed for docile, respectful domesticity, not employment and economic independence. *Maulwīs* and women teachers in *madrasahs* criticized rural parents' inadequacies, devalued uncivilized rural ways, and disparaged dirty and ignorant villagers, their coarse manners and their obscenity-laden rustic dialectic.<sup>77</sup> *Madrasah* staff in rural *madrasahs* saw purifying the religious practices of the rural masses and giving village children polish and refinement as their duty—in other words, spreading the gentrified manners and life-styles of the educated urban (and urbane) middle classes to villagers. It is hardly surprising, then, that many elements in the *Larkiyon*

<sup>77</sup> This is not a uniquely Islamic vision. Hindu teachers (who were mainly from the upper castes) also emphasized the importance of girls' education for their future domestic roles and were scornful about village environments. Similarly, Hindu parents focused on the effect of education on their daughters' marriage chances.

*kā Islāmī Course* do not mesh well with villagers’ daily lives and priorities. Pupils’ interpretations, of course, are not delimited by the obvious didactic purposes of their teachers. Some girls may see texts such as the *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* as irrelevant or even incomprehensible, and simply go through the motions of learning what their teachers require. Some may make resistant readings. Yet others may earnestly try to mend their ways or be shamed that their uncouth rustic uncouthness is confirmed (Kumar 1989: 76). It is certainly difficult to assess the impact of the *Course* on village lifestyles. We have no clear evidence of improvements in domestic management that can be directly attributed to its teachings, although some Muslim parents were pleased if their daughters brought home new ideas about domestic management and hygiene.

Criticism of ‘un-Islamic’ practices rests on claims to superior understanding of what Islam requires, claims that are not always wholly conceded. Villagers did not openly object to being informed about ‘correct’ religious practice—yet, in the absence of adequate health care facilities, visiting shrines to obtain amulets was an accepted way of dealing with intractable medical problems. *Madrasah* staff often emphasized the difficulties they experienced in the classroom: correcting pupils’ speech and teaching them social graces and manners required children to learn a second language, of the tongue as well as the body. As with the exclusionary character of school Hindi, Urdu is not rural Muslims’ ‘mother tongue’—and to learn it, moreover, village children were exposed to the disparagement of *madrasah* staff.<sup>78</sup> Controversial practices (e.g. songs sung at weddings and after the birth of boys) are still widespread among rural Muslim women, despite the exhortations to abandon them that echo earlier assaults on activities that give women space for fun and verbal resistance (Banerjee 1989; see also Jeffery and Jeffery 1996a; Jeffery *et al.* 1989; Raheja and Gold 1994). Villagers’ alternative discourses revolved around assertions that educated girls put on airs, talk superciliously to their un-educated peers, scorn to speak like other villagers, or adopt urban habits—such as daily bathing—in order to set themselves above their neighbours. Costly and showy ceremonies—

<sup>78</sup> Writers on Hindi often admit that many people—mainly villagers—in the ‘Hindi belt’ are not Hindi-speakers, in the sense of speaking school Hindi. By contrast, most of those discussing Urdu describe Urdu as the ‘mother tongue’ of Muslims throughout UP. Probably this is part of political claims in favour of Urdu, but it does not square with our own observations, leave aside the comments of *madrasah* staff about their pupils’ speech.

such as weddings and dowries—were particular targets of disapproval in the *Course*. Villagers were certainly perturbed by the greedy demands of grooms' families, brides' vulnerability to harassment, and the indebtedness incurred when organizing marriages. Yet what parents felt compelled to include in their daughters' dowries was continually increasing in line with the greater availability of consumer goods. Villagers feared for their 'honour' if they seemed miserly rather than generous, and they would save and borrow rather than be shamed. Moreover, educated girls were widely considered to need *larger* dowries if they were to attract a 'good' match commensurate with their education. The notion that careful household budgeting and simple, reformed Islamic life styles not only safeguard economic well-being but enhance reputations sits rather uneasily with such a consumption ethic. Villagers, then, have not wholly conceded the virtues of the 'civilizing mission'.

In any case, frugality is not simply a life-style *choice* for the poor. Nowhere does the *Course* address people's sources of income, although a cash economy seems to be presumed. Unbalanced domestic budgeting is attributed to women's incompetence and mismanagement—not to the seasonal, insufficient and often substantially non-cash character of many rural incomes. Although *madrasah* staff were aware of rural poverty, they generally attributed it to ignorance rather than to the constraints of rural economic life and class structures. Most rural Muslim parents cannot afford 'good' education for their children. No more can they afford all the domestic refinements that accompany being 'civilized'. Yet the *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* flaunts an unmistakably middle class and urban bias: several stories are set in relatively wealthy urban homes with several rooms and a paved courtyard, with a separate kitchen and enough utensils to require cupboards and storage space. Some even feature the management of domestic servants. Recipes and descriptions of meals portray an unrealistic level of affluence and availability of ingredients.

Stories also reflect urban middle class presumptions about women's work and leisure. Village women cannot devote hours to preparing several sumptuous dishes for each meal. Women are exhorted to set out a dining cloth on the floor and to wash it daily—but people in villages often sit on a bed or hunker down by the hearth to eat for want of any other clean space. Women are assumed to have plenty of time for housecleaning and embroidery. Animal husbandry is mentioned only with reference to dealing with milk hygien-

ically, with no concessions to the daily uphill battle to maintain tidiness and cleanliness when cattle are stalled in or near the home. The time and hard labour that many village women devote to making dung cakes for fuel or fetching fodder and water for livestock are not acknowledged. Rather, women are presumed to need the exercise that spinning and hand milling provides in the home—and the protection from leisure time that gives free rein to pointless chatter. Hard physical work is advocated in the *Course* and women are assumed not to have enough of it. Village women themselves, however, routinely complained about their heavy work and its lack of recognition (Jeffery *et al.* 1989: 43–60).

In several respects, then, the *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* valorizes images of distinction, taste and domestication that rural Muslim girls will find difficult (if not impossible) to put into practice because they are so out of kilter with the realities of village life. Perhaps the portrayals of young brides are the most likely images to resonate with them. Girls would have little difficulty in mapping stories of wifely obedience and respect for elders onto the expectations expressed in everyday village life. Yet even here, the gulf between such ideals and how people behave would be conspicuous. Obedience and insubordination co-exist. Women should not shout and answer back—but they often do so. Men should be quietly spoken—yet they often verbally and physically abuse their wives. Mothers-in-law do not always deal kindly with their son’s wives. Young women may conceal things from their in-laws or engage in malicious gossip behind their backs. Young men may argue with their fathers about work and property. The serene home, complete with ordered religiosity and domesticity and with hierarchies of gender and seniority in their proper place, is an ideal not always fully matched by daily realities.

The nineteenth and early twentieth century advice texts in Urdu were part of a wider response from the Muslim service gentry to threats to their entrenched position. The genre particularly addressed urban middle class women and girls, who were exhorted by its male authors to practise purified Islam along with the ‘modernity’ of disciplined domesticity and the ‘tradition’ of disciplined wifehood. Regulatory though this new patriarchy was, however, economic and social privilege also enabled some women to experience their education and self-improvement as empowering and liberating, as autobiographies of the time attest. Trenchant critiques of gender politics and demands for women’s rights to property and employment

were evident in women's contributions to publishing, the nascent women's organizations and the independence movement.

Since 1947, Muslims' 'new colonial relation' in contemporary India has implied community control, protection and surveillance over the spiritual and the domestic, which is liable to be profoundly problematic for gender equity.<sup>79</sup> A case in point is *madrasah* education's role in the reproduction of community. Learning Urdu in a *madrasah* at a time when Hindi and school education prevail in UP is one issue, because the daily lives of rural Muslim girls are largely contained within community boundaries. Yet that very encapsulation also insulates them from a 'mainstream' that is extremely uncongenial for Muslims. *Madrasahs* are a response to the inadequacies of educational provision in contemporary western UP: insufficient schools and teachers to meet demand, and curricula and atmosphere that reflect the pre-eminence of the upper caste Hindi establishment in educational politics. The mismatch between the hopes of *madrasah* staff and what is acceptable or possible for villagers in large measure reflects an urban bias, which coexists with more overarching assumptions about women's role in the domestic sphere. If the gender politics of Urdu textbooks such as *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* have doubtful potential for empowerment, so, too, are the presumptions of domesticity, not economic independence, that still guide girls' education, at least in small towns like Bijnor. In the present climate of communal politics and given the educational provision in western UP, it is far from clear that *madrasah* education is providing rural girls with an especially poor educational option. In schools and *madrasahs* alike the devaluation of village ways and the disciplining nature of the curriculum are unlikely to make girls' educational experiences empowering and fulfilling, and belie the optimism of those who emphasize the emancipatory potential of education.

## Appendix

Among Nazir Ahmad's contemporaries, Mumtaz Ali was an enthusiast of both *Mirāt ul-'Arūs* and *Majalis un-Nissa* for their good Urdu style and the useful information that they contain (Minault 1990: 157). By contrast, in *Bihishti Zewar*, Thanawi lists suitable further

<sup>79</sup> For comments along these lines on the Shah Bano case, see Jeffery 2001: 2–6 and the references included there.

reading, and, perhaps unwisely (as Robinson 1996: 93 note 30 puts it), lists harmful books—in which he includes Nazir Ahmad’s *Mirāt ul-‘Arūs*. Metcalf comments that Asghari seems to be Thanawi’s ideal, but suggests that Nazir Ahmad’s sympathetic treatment of other religions and the broad curriculum in Asghari’s school may have aroused Thanawi’s hostility. She also agrees with Naim’s speculation that Thanawi was discomforted by Asghari’s competence, dynamism and strength of character, especially in comparison with the male characters in the book (Metcalf 1989; 1990: 325–7; Naim 1984: 308).

Late twentieth-century academic writers (male as well as female) seem to find the fictional heroines in books such as Nazir Ahmad’s *Mirāt ul-‘Arūs* and Hālī’s *Majalis un-Nissa* exasperating. Aziz Ahmad considers that Nazir Ahmad’s novels ‘suffer from an excess of didacticism not merely in the plot, but through lengthy sermonizing which is directly religious or ethical’ (Ahmad 1969: 109), while Sangari (1999: 197) comments on the ‘claustrophobic pedagogy’ of books in this genre. Asghari, the heroine of *Mirāt ul-‘Arūs*, is described as a paradigm as well as a paragon and Pritchett quotes Iftkhār Ahmad Siddīqī in his Urdu biography of Nazir Ahmad of saying that ‘the worst flaw of Asghari’s character is her flawlessness’ (Pritchett 2001: 220). For Minault, Asghari is the ‘very model of the ideal, modern Muslim woman . . . competent to an incredible, almost insufferable, degree’ (Minault 1993:5). Naim comments that Asghari ‘is always right, and this does begin to annoy us’ (Naim 1984: 302) and he describes her as ‘overbearingly smart’ and a ‘superwoman’ (Naim 1987: 112, 115). Russell is clearly a fan of Nazir Ahmad’s prose style and lively dialogues—but he is also tempted to speculate ‘what Nazir Ahmad might have done if he had chosen to write novels rather than improving tales’ (Russell 1992: 99).

But several writers also comment favourably on the Nazir Ahmad’s lively vernacular style, especially in the dialogues, and note his sense of comedy. Unlike the *Larkiyon kā Islāmī Course* [Girls’ Islamic Course], in which the riddles are not even amusing, *Mirāt ul-‘Arūs* is redeemed by being intentionally funny. In the face of the paragon Asghari, it is hard not to be wryly amused by (and perhaps feel empathy with) the portrait of the hopelessly incompetent housewife, her older sister Akbari. Nazir Ahmad tells us, for instance, that Akbari’s ‘first *chappattie* was of a marvellous appearance: neither round nor square; one corner sticking out here, and four corners there; the edges thick, the centre like a wafer; burnt on one side,



not baked on the other, but all black with smoke . . . [she] prepared a meal so delicious and exquisite that any appetite would be scared away by the very sight of it' and so on (Ahmad 2001 [1903]: 41). Her efforts—as well as her laziness—cause a string of domestic calamities, ranging from being cheated by her unsuitable friends to losing her clothes to the depredations of rats and white ants.

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